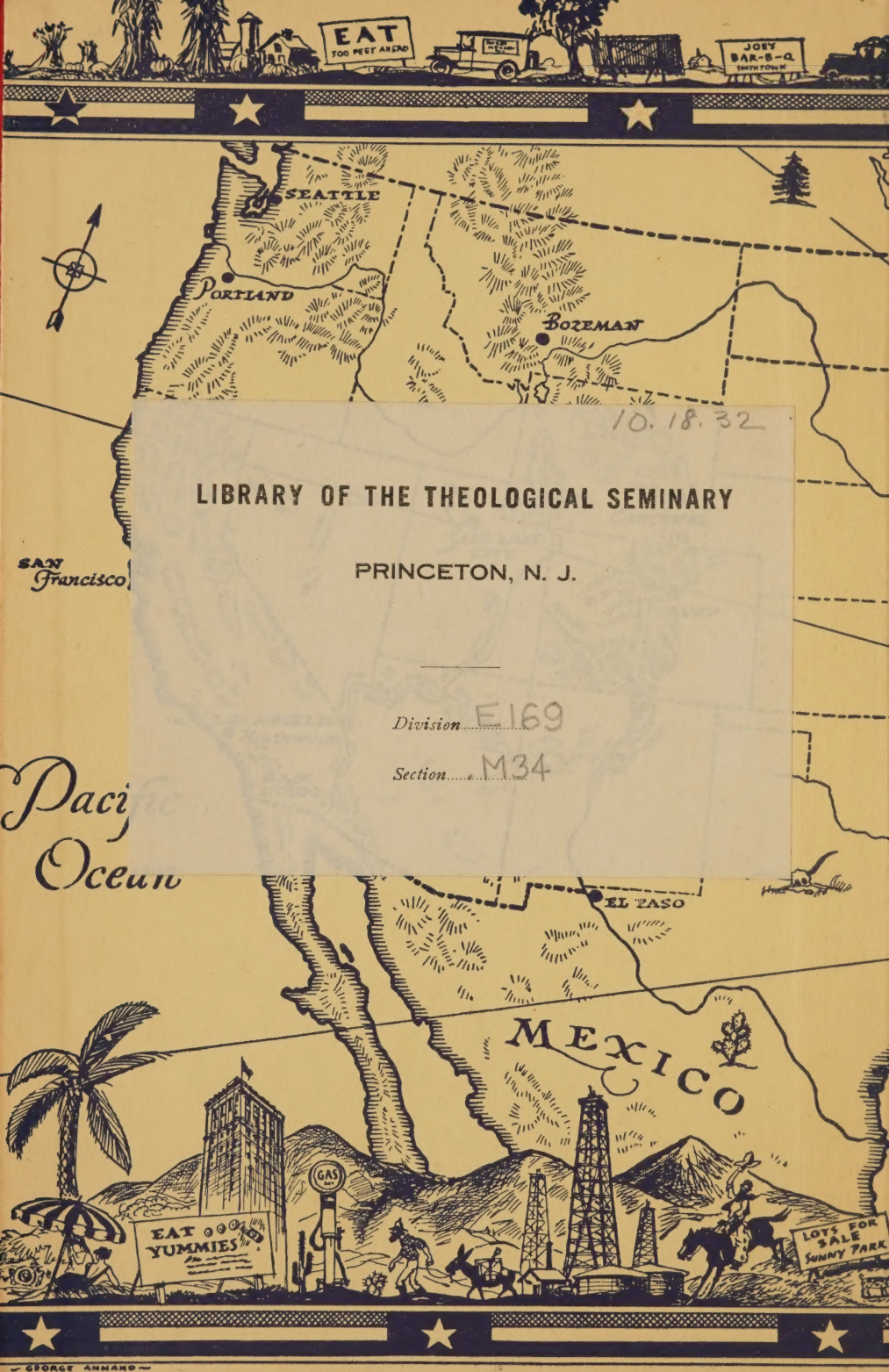
THIS COUNTRY OF YOURS

BY MORRIS MARKEY



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MORRIS MARKEY

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FOR

MY MOTHER AND FATHER

With Affection

Introduction

I WANTED to know what this country called America is really like. I reached the uneasy conclusion that all my understanding of America, gained from sitting in New York and founding my judgments upon the dramatic overtones, was likely to be distressingly oblique. Was it entirely reasonable to glance at the obvious things: the puerile squawk of the radio, the Babbitt legend of Mr. Lewis, the mawkish excitements of the newspapers, the giddy nonsense of advertising writers and marathon dancers and aviation heroes, the Aimee Semple McPhersons and the moving-picture magnates — and decide without further inquiry that this was America? That seemed a little slipshod. Was it even remotely possible that the clamorous ballyhoo was obscuring the identity of a quite different America?

Arrogant soldier fellows and pot-bellied beer drinkers bawling sentimental stein songs once obscured a quite different Germany. Complaisant ma'mselles and the peddlers of obscene postcards and the politicians of the Quai

d'Orsay even now obscure a different France. Lecturing novelists and the sorrows of the dole and the dogged stupidity of ladies and gentlemen dashing after foxes conceal a different England. All Spain is not a bull ring, all Italy not a platoon of black shirts.

I went to see. I got into a Ford automobile and set out to call on Americans at home. I wanted to talk to as many Americans as possible, everywhere and of every station, to undertake the immense impertinence of worming my way into their homes and into their private thoughts, for I wanted to discover how they live and what they live by, what they are concealing, if anything at all, behind the passive amiability of the faces they show in public. With great deliberation I avoided the professional spokesmen, the glib few who have allowed all their understanding of their neighbors to fall into the familiar clichés. I hunted for people who are not accustomed to the opportunity of saying what they think about themselves and their friends and their country.

I had one excellent advantage. To me, an itinerant stranger, men and women submitted ideas and conceptions which they would not, perhaps, confide to their friends. For they fear, these Americans, that ready laughter which comes from their kind at any unclothing of the secret thoughts.

Seeking a rough pattern for my approach to a land so enormous — in order to make the simple business of reaching it by motor car a little more rational — I made certain divisions of the country: the Iron Country of the Lakes region, the Middle Prairies, etc. Of course it is factitious to partition America in any fashion so neat as that, and there were anomalies enough to be discovered everywhere.

But the device served my purposes well enough, on the whole, and that seemed to be excuse enough for using it.

At the last, however, there were certain findings and certain conclusions which related to the country as a whole and would not fit very well into any one of the divisions. These things I reserved for a last chapter to cast accounts.

The list of people to whom I owe my thanks is appallingly long. I wish to express my gratitude to Otis Wiese, the editor of *McCall's Magazine*, who published the articles upon which this book is founded; to John Turman, who drove the Ford and undertook most of the drudgery of travel; to Walter Lippmann and Arthur Krock and Ralph Hayes and Carl Brandt for generous help. But I can thank only in collective manner all those hospitable and kind people whom I encountered, in whose houses I was made welcome. They, in the last analysis, made the story.

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THIS COUNTRY OF YOURS

I

The Iron Empire

FOR a beginning, I went to the region that might be called the Iron Empire. It is the heavy heart of industry with Pittsburgh at its core — a triangle of earth that Andrew Carnegie called the most economical spot in the world for the manufacture and fabrication of steel. He called it that because iron and coal and limestone and men, the four elements necessary for making steel, may be brought together cheaply.

I started with the farthest outpost of the triangle, with the raw iron that is the foundation of all our modern living. It is, perhaps, quite fitting that the raw iron should come from a frontier. It comes from a low range of hills called the Mesabi, which lies a few miles back of Duluth in Minnesota: bare, red hills that are virtually solid iron.

Duluth is spread in the curve of a high bluff and the streets mount from the blue water of Lake Superior through many trees to the edge of an empty plain. They stop abruptly there and you stand looking into a wilderness. It is a slightly shabby wilderness, to be sure, for a

single generation has snatched three separate treasures from it. First, they crept through the great forest, killing animals for their fur. Then, when most of the animals were dead, they cut down the forest itself, for lumber. Now they dig up the earth, which is iron. But even along the concrete road that leads out from the city through a tangle of second-growth trees, even when the ore trains are whistling their urgent way down to the lake, there is brooding and loneliness and the faint flavor of primeval beauty in the wilderness.

Sixty miles from Duluth, in the midst of that empty land, are the hills — the greatest deposits of iron ore in the world — and a little chain of towns that perch on the rim of the immense canyons dug out by electric shovels. The largest of the towns is called Virginia: two wide, quiet streets, a spanking new municipal building made out of red brick in the Georgian style, a spanking new schoolhouse that also is made out of red brick, and a scattering of concrete store fronts.

It was a little strange to discover that there were no miners and that this was in no real sense a mining town at all. The ore is simply earth. The pockets are so rich and so thick that extraction is simply a matter of stripping off with dynamite a few feet of surface rock and sand, spooning out the ore with mechanical shovels, and loading it into railroad cars. A handful of men take out fifty thousand tons a day with no extraordinary effort.

I went to see the superintendent of operations. He was a lean, quiet man about fifty, with a dark, square face, and he was sitting in his shirt sleeves behind a desk made out of golden oak. The desk was covered with papers in neat little piles and it was odd to watch his great, bent fingers

picking up the flimsy sheets. I asked him if he had come up from the mines.

"Certainly," he said. "Nobody could run this outfit that didn't know all about it."

I said, "Tell me how the people live out here. Are they satisfied? Do you ever have any trouble?"

He looked up sharply. "If they're not satisfied, it's their own fault. Of course they're satisfied. The company does everything for them. Look at that new school building, across the street there ——" We craned our necks to look out of the window. "You would think now," he said, "that it was built with tax money. It was, all right, but who paid the taxes? The citizens? No, the company. We pay over ninety per cent of all the town and county taxes, and the people pay the other ten per cent. They live almost tax free. The company pays for all the paving, and all the government, and all the buildings. Who would have any right to be dissatisfied with that?"

I said, "You know, the country is full of fellows like you, and I never get over being amazed by it."

He wanted to know what I was talking about.

"You spend half a lifetime working down in those pits," I said, "taking your wages and cursing your boss and believing you are worth twice the money the company is paying you. Then somebody puts you in an office job. One day it turns out that you are one of the bosses. And all you can think about is The Company. You are more devoted to The Company than you are to anything else in the world. Why?"

His face lightened and he almost smiled. "Human beings are funny folks," he said.

"That isn't any answer."

"Well," he said, "you have to be loyal, don't you?"

"To a lot of stockholders down in Pittsburgh?"

"Why not? I don't care who the stockholders are or who gets the money. My job is to get iron out of that ground and get it out cheap. You can't quarrel with a man for trying to do his job right, can you?"

"What would you rather do than anything else in the world?" I asked him.

He answered without a moment's hesitation. "Cut a dollar a ton off the cost of ore loaded on the freight cars."

"You would cut your men's wages to do it — you wouldn't care what happened to the town: all these schools and paving we were talking about?"

"That's it," he said.

"Well," I told him, "you're a tough hombre."

"You have to be tough when you're handling iron."

The red metal was his god. He moved, in a vague dream of iron, through the quiet house that his meek wife kept for him a few doors away from his office. He read newspapers and the journals of the iron trade, nothing else. He never went to the moving-picture theater, or to the church, or to the homes of his acquaintances. He had never voted in his life and had only a sketchy knowledge of the government under which he lived. There were many evenings, after the whistle had blown, when he could be seen, a solitary figure, picking his way along the bottom of the great canyon that the shovels had dug.

I talked with a crew boss. He was nearly sixty, a Dane, who had been in the neighborhood of the Mesabi for thirty years. He had arrived, first, with a logging crew.

"They got us drunk in Chicago," he said. "They came up to me on the street and said, 'Have a drink, you?' and

I went in the saloon. Pretty soon I was drunk and then, pretty soon again, I was in a logging camp up by the Lake of the Woods. That's north from here. I was logging with those people until the timber ran out. We had towns, too, in those days——" He laughed deeply at his lusty memories. "Then they found the iron and now, look, I'm crew boss."

I said, "Why did you leave Denmark in the first place?"

He said, "I remember that town Copenhagen. I went to school there, too, and left when I was twenty. Oh, yes; it was a fine town if you had the money. But nowhere is a fine town when you're hungry, hey?"

I said, "Tell me what you find in America that you couldn't find in Denmark?"

He looked at me for a long time, as if he thought I might be pulling his leg, or was a little crazy. A whistle blew a long blast and men began picking up their tools. "You come to my house," he said. So I went to his house. It was a two-room bungalow, painted white, on the very edge of the town, overlooking the awful scar upon the earth's face where he worked every day. The furniture in the bungalow was hard and sparse and it was apparent at once that he lived quite alone. Everything was marvelously clean. In a little shed back of the house his car was sitting, shiny and new, and from a hole in the floor of the shed he drew up a gallon jug full of white liquor. "Let's sit down and drink," he said, and we found chairs facing each other across the empty fireplace.

"You see what I' got," he said, and he spoke with deep pride, swinging his hand out in a gesture. On the mantelshelf were some books: five or six volumes of a cheap encyclopedia, Robert Ingersoll's lectures, several detec-

tive stories, and an old, ragged Life of Jenny Lind. Attached to the wall above the mantel was a colored likeness of Charles Lindbergh, the size of a newspaper page.

"Would I get this in Denmark?" he asked. "Would I be my own man? Nobody to bother me? Now I tell you a funny thing. The laws in Denmark, they are just as good as here. Maybe better. The people are good people. But a man can't do what he wants to do there. He does what somebody tells him to do — and I don't even know who tells him. His family, maybe. But you live the way you were born to live. Not here. Oh, no. When I get tired of the iron, some day, I will go on to somewhere else — farming, maybe — in the stockyards at Chicago, maybe. Do you see? A man belongs to himself. And did you ever see the workmen's huts in Denmark? Did you ever pay the workmen's taxes out of those little wages? I guess maybe not, hey?

"Once I went back to Denmark. I save money and when I want to go somewhere, I just go. Like that. But I did not stay there long. It made me feel bad to see all those cousins and nephews of mine, looking like they were sick to be alive. I came back to my iron."

"Do you vote?" I asked him.

"I am a citizen," he said reprovingly. "I vote for anybody who will let these things stay like they are. That is the big trouble in America. Everybody worries too much about America; everybody wants to change. Me, I'm happy like it is."

He read the local newspapers every day. He went to the movies two nights a week, when the film changed, and he had his favorite performers. Once a month, on the average, he and another Dane got drunk together. It never

occurred to him to wonder what happened to the iron he dug out of the ground, or what sort of people would turn it, eventually, into curling-irons and piano strings, automobiles and pitchforks and skyscrapers. He simply sat in the midst of his contentment, turning out his thousands of tons a day, and hoping in his mild manner to avoid death as long as possible.

I met a shovel man. He was a quiet and hard-bitten fellow, and it was his job to perch in the carriage of one of the vast electric scoops, gouging up the ore out of the earth. He was from Pennsylvania and quite new to the Mesabi. Most of his life had been spent digging with just such a shovel the foundations for buildings and bridges, back in his native State.

He took me to his house. It was a grim, cheerless shelter. His wife was harassed by three children and she had neither the taste nor the heart for making a snug home. But she was cheerful enough. Even when she was remarking upon her bitter contempt for the raw life of the Mesabi, she was cheerful.

"Why did you come here?" I asked.

The man said at once, "New country is better for the kids. Too crowded back home. A youngster coming along don't get the chance to stick his head up."

I asked, "How do you like the way you live, now that you're here?"

He looked up in genuine surprise, as if it had never occurred to him to wonder about the simple matter of living. But his wife was quick to answer. It was terrible. She longed, day and night, for the old streets of Philadelphia and the old house they had lived in, with lifelong neighbors all around.

"But," she said, "we came for the youngsters and we'll stand it for the youngsters. Why not? It's what you live for, ain't it? The youngsters?"

I asked them if they ever had any amusement and the man thought hard for a moment or two. "Sometimes," he said, "I go up and fish in one of the lakes. About two months ago I did that, 'way up on Seven Beavers Lake. That was fine. I had a fine time out there by myself, with nothing but the trees. Most of the fellows have a trailer to hang to the back of their car and they take the whole family out to spend nights in the woods. They talk a lot about the big times they have and the fish they catch. I guess maybe we'll get one of those trailers sometime.

"But I just work along, now. Get home tired and spend most of my time figuring with the wife on what we're going to make out of the kids. This is pretty tough country, Mister, and you don't have much time to frolic around."

"We're going to educate the boys," the woman said. For all her defeat at the hands of life, for all the whine that had come into her voice with years and all her aimless futility as a housewife, there was a curious strength in her voice when she said that. And the man nodded. "We'll educate the boys," he said.

Without knowing it at all, they were speaking the eternal creed of the pioneer: the sacrifice of all the amenities by one generation that the next might have the fruits. Along the Mesabi, which still is pioneer country — vast and empty and full of hardship — the children are the gods. There are no adult amusements, no folk life, no rural delights. The men and the women labor and get tired and are anæsthetized by their weariness and by the struggle to overcome the harsh discomforts of living in so remote

and makeshift a civilization. They are anæsthetized to all thoughts except one — and that is for the next generation. The schools are the center of community life. The savings banks and the insurance companies do an excellent business.

The Mesabi is perhaps the last vestigial remainder of the pioneer movement: that dimly calculated westward thrust of people who shook together their energies and, somewhat to their own surprise, no doubt, journeyed out across the mountains. At any rate, the Mesabi is a remainder of the rank and file of pioneering. And you may discover there an unromantic truth or two about the people of this rank and file, concerning whom so much of romantic untruth has been written. The arduous undertaking of the trip itself, the difficulty of making the decision, the pulling up of roots and the surrender of a familiar way of life, seem to have spent their forces. They are left no strength to found that thing we call a folk culture, and so these people's lives are filled with discomfort and with harsh labor. There are no imaginations left to embellish the barren hours of leisure. They settle into a new routine, more arduous than the old, and so translate all of their dreamy aspirations into the bodies of their offspring.

Back in Duluth, now, I encountered pioneers who fitted more properly into the fine legend of the westward sweep. They had been the captains of pioneering, so to speak, and they had managed in one way or another to discover the pot of gold at the foot of the rainbow. By what ruthlessness I did not feel disposed to inquire, they had wrenched their small fortunes from the fur and the timber and the discovery of iron. They had come down out of

the hills, and on the steep shores of that splendid lake they had built themselves a city.

I met a considerable number of them one evening in a big stucco house that overlooked an immense stretch of blue water and wooded land. The living room of the house was decorated with that detailed perfection of elegance which is so naturally come upon at the outposts — the brave stand of old manners against the encroaching wild — as men in desolate solitude will dress carefully for dinner every evening and women will haul the trappings of their sustaining vanity to the midst of a jungle.

Most of the people I met were born somewhere in the East. But with their rewards won from the Mesabi it had not occurred to them to go back. None of them owned any share of the iron mines, for that hoard belongs to the steel corporations now. Yet their sense of possession of the land they live upon is very strong. The wilderness, the dark forests, the red hills of iron, are among the constant and intimate realities of their lives. This is not to say that they regard their land romantically, for they do not. It is simply a part of their existence, and I think they still feel a vague astonishment that they were able to come into it and bend it to their wills — bend it to the extent that they might sit, now, in polite drawing-rooms and talk with light amusement of their terrible struggle. Beneath their urbanity there was apparent a full store of that tireless vitality which we like to think of as a heritage with the American race, and as a matter of truth there was not one among them who did not wish, secretly and perhaps unconsciously, that he was still in the midst of his battle.

One of the women said: "I never had been west of

Philadelphia when I married and got on a train and came out to the iron mines. They were just beginning to open the mines, and Jack was an engineer. I never will forget that little shack he took me to, out in that desolate place along the hills. The town was eight saloons and a general store. Nothing else. Whenever I went to the store I used to count the drunken men I had to step over. They just got drunk and lay down on the sidewalk to sleep. One day I counted thirty-nine.

"I never heard of anybody that worked as hard as we did. But when I went back home, the second Christmas, it was Philadelphia that seemed strange. I felt lost there. I was glad to get back to the Mesabi. I haven't been East now in ten years."

There was a timber man. He had spent his early days logging on the streams that led down from the forests. He had made a good deal of money buying up timber lands and then converting his profits into mineral rights. His career was behind him — he was forty-seven and had left an Illinois college in his freshman year to strike out alone for the new country — but his heart was still with the big logs tumbling in the rivers. Every year he wins the burling championship among all the loggers of the Northwest. His life has toughened his fibers and there is some odd, tremendous force in his black eyes, looking out from beneath brows that are huge and shaggy. He and I stood by the buffet in the dining room, considering the excellence of a bottle of port.

"I just got back from camp yesterday," he said. "It's a remote little camp, away up toward the Canadian line, and I had to walk the last twenty-five miles to get to it. While I was there I heard about a tragedy. It was very sad.

"You never heard of Old Man Guthrie. Well, he's been trapping and logging and prospecting for mineral deposits in this country for thirty years — poking his nose into all sorts of wild places. He was born in Maine and came out here with a Maine wife. He always carried her along with him — an old woman now. I never heard her speak a word.

"Well, Old Man Guthrie must have been getting a little unsteady in the legs. Anyway, his wife went out to look for him, when he didn't come back for supper one night about a week ago, and she found him caught on a snag in the creek. His head was under water, and he was dead all right. She pulled him up on the side of the bank and went to look for help.

"She walked nine miles to Joe Stewart's camp. Joe's a trapper who still gets some mighty fine skins out of the woods. Joe told the widow it was no use for him to go back alone with her. They would have to bury the old man, and he couldn't do it alone. So they set out together and hunted up Uncle Henry Taylor, who sort of lives up in the woods there. When they got to Uncle Henry's place, they found a surprise. His boy, Jeddy, had married a French-Canadian girl, and they were sort of celebrating.

"But Joe explained how things were, and so the whole troop of 'em started back: the widow, and Joe Stewart, and Uncle Henry Taylor, and young Jeddy Taylor, and the bride. They got the corpse up on high ground and started out right away to make a coffin. They didn't have the right tools, but they made it somehow. Then they ran into the first difficulty. They had to lift the body into the coffin, and Uncle Henry and his boy refused to touch it.

"Uncle Henry said, 'No, sir — I can't go liftin' that

thing. Lord, man, I couldn't take a chaw of tobacco for a week. . . .' And Jeddy felt the same way about it. But the widow and the bride weren't quite so squeamish, and they put the Old Man in and nailed down the lid. Then they had to dig the grave, and that started an argument. Uncle Henry said he had always heard that graves should be dug north and south, and Joe Stewart held out that they had to be dug east and west. They got into a terrible argument about it, both saying that any mistake would be disastrous to the Old Man's chances of getting to heaven. Finally, Jeddy suggested a compromise. Dig the grave on a bias, he said, from northwest to southeast. So they did.

"When they got all ready to lower away, the widow said that somebody ought to read a service, or say a few good words about the Old Man. Everybody agreed to that, but nobody knew any kind of service except the bride, and all she knew was a smattering of some prayers in Latin. The widow ruled that out. Then Joe Stewart said that instead of a service they could sing something. That met with a general approval, but it turned out that there wasn't any song that everybody knew.

"Everybody began trying to think of a song, and finally Joe Stewart said he thought he could remember the first two verses of 'Red Wing' — and Uncle Henry said he thought he could remember some of the song if Joe would hum it over first. They went off down the woods a little way and practiced for a few minutes and came back to say they were all ready. So they lined up beside the grave, the two singers on one side and the rest of 'em on the other. Jeddy had the shovel, and he was to put the dirt in while the singing went on.

"Joe Stewart and Uncle Henry began. You remember how it goes — 'Red Wing, my pretty Red Wing. . . .' Jeddy got the shovel to going.

"But just then a terrible thing happened. The widow and the bride were crying pretty bad and shaking a lot. It seems the bride had on a pair of those long red flannel drawers that lumberjacks always wear. She had rolled 'em up to her knees. Well, with all her crying and shaking, they began to come down. Joe Stewart and Uncle Henry were singing away, and both saw it together. Joe Stewart nudged Uncle Henry and frowned, and Uncle Henry frowned too. They began singing a lot louder. But that made the bride cry all the more, and now those red drawers were all the way down around her shoe tops. I guess it must have been pretty funny looking. Anyway, right in the middle of the second verse of 'Red Wing', Joe Stewart and Uncle Henry got to the point where they couldn't stand it any longer. They just exploded, laughing so hard they fell down on the ground right there beside the grave. The others couldn't see what was happening to the bride. They thought Uncle Henry and Joe had gone crazy. The upshot of it was that the widow fainted and all the rest of them turned and ran as hard as they could. They never went back. The widow came into camp while I was there, asking for a burial party to come up and bring a Bible if possible."

When we had finished laughing, I told him I was glad that good old American yarn-spinning hadn't gone dry — that there was still a crop of tall tales left in the land. He protested to the last that every word of it was true, which, of course, was the proper attitude.

He said, "That country looked desolate to you, I know.

But you just drove the road between here and Virginia. You didn't get up a little to the north of there and see the lakes. Hundreds of lakes and streams. Anybody getting a glimpse like yours would think that we just pulled Nature up by the roots, and care nothing about it. But I think these people up here, all kinds of people, have a tremendous feeling for Nature. Everybody I know spends his spare time prowling through the wilds up there. And when you've got forty thousand square miles of it, it doesn't look like the picnic grounds on a Sunday afternoon."

One of the women had come in to join us by the buffet. She was tall and blonde, and for all the delicacy of her face she was enormously capable looking. She said, "Somebody ought to have a talk with Keyserling. You remember he said that Americans have no feeling at all for Nature — just spoil it to get what they want — only conception of Nature is to conquer it. Something like that. Well, it's one of those ridiculous things that have just enough smattering of truth to be plausible. I can hear them now — a lot of little people taking Keyserling for gospel, sitting back in their chairs, little tolerant smiles on their faces, 'Oh, but of course, you know, Americans have no feeling for Nature. Just the urge to conquer it. . . .' That gives me a slight pain.

"Our little conquest of Nature up here has hardly put a scratch on it. It's still virgin land, most of it. Half a State. People like Keyserling simply have no idea how big this country is. They never get past the mine towns and the lumber mills. They don't know anything about those thousands of miles of empty woods, with a thousand lakes scattered around. They don't know anything about the people that go off, every week-end and every idle day,

and put up their little camps in some quiet place, and just sit there. They don't know anything about that marvelous quiet and the marvelous beauty of trees and water.

"Maybe I know strange sort of people who aren't like other Americans. But the ones I do know get more out of woods and lakes and mountains than they do out of anything else."

I said that I had already noticed, driving along through the country, the extraordinary devotion to flowers. "I have hardly seen a single house," I said, "that didn't have some kind of flowers growing. The most unlikely places, some of them — grubby little shacks and even grubbier suburban villas. But that pot of flowers is always there."

We stayed in that house until nearly two o'clock. I am sorry that I cannot report any more accurately what we talked about. I know that business never came up. Nobody seemed interested in the government. Everybody seemed to have a good time, and everybody seemed to be reasonably pleased with himself and his wife. Everybody was full of an extraordinary health and a seemly humor in the face of his precarious mortality.

It was impossible to discover any concern for the rest of America, for the destiny of America as a nation or for the solution of those problems of national culture which currently beset us. They do not, I think, live by anything which might be called an American tradition. Their lives, their thoughts, stem immediately from the traditions that they founded when they won the struggle against the rigors of their own small empire. They have not yet begun to wonder at the mystery and the treachery, the pervading sorrow and the golden hope which envelop human living, for they are not wondering about anything at all just yet.

Leisure is a new discovery for them after savage toil, and they have hardly begun to think what they will do with it. They have come momentarily to rest with one specific goal attained, and it would be altogether futile to prophesy upon what fresh goal they will spend the great store of vitality that is still left to them.

· 2 ·

I went next to the coal country along the western slope of the Alleghenies.

You ride along the curving ribbons of white road and the mountains reach somberly above you toward a clear, pale sky. And now and again, rounding a hillside, you will see the bleak, angular tower that marks a pit head, jutting harshly out of the earth.

The coal mines are scattered over a wide country. The cities are few and small, and most of the miners live in remote little villages that stare blankly from the edge of the road. The villages and the houses in them are owned, for the most part, by the companies that own the mines. The houses are primitive and small and gray and very old. The melancholy air of poverty hangs heavy upon them — that hushed air of rural poverty which is so much more deeply affecting than the worst city slum. It marks very profoundly the faces of the women and the girls and the children, who sit on the ramshackle porches, nursing obscure dreams.

I went to Fairmount, in West Virginia. It is a small, raw town of unshaded streets and cluttered shop windows, of beaneries and bargain counters. It has been there, I suppose, for more than half a century, but in that time the

thousands of people who have been born and lived and died there have put no imprint of grace of permanence upon it. You have the instinctive feeling that the grubbiness springs chiefly from one cause: the men who make the money out of coal do not live in the coal country; for those who do live there, the struggle for existence is unending and severe, numbing the mind and the spirit to the gentilities of existence.

I talked to the general manager of a mining corporation. He was a worried man, and unhappy — young and brisk but full of continuous anxiety. He had come out of college inoculated with ambition and tremendous hope. He had risen in a remarkably short time to this position of authority. He was a success — and he was, at bottom, far less contented with his life than the meanest apprentice loader I met in all the mines.

His mind was a weaving turmoil of shifts going down into pits, of empties moving on schedule down the donkey line and safety rules being watched, of shipments and production costs, of wage disputes and vague murmurings among the men that were always on the point of becoming serious. He looked and acted like a man on the brink of disaster — yet he showed me that his operations were working smoothly, that the profit he showed was satisfactory, that his board of directors had just given him a vote of confidence and thanks.

I went to his home. It was a pleasant enough home, deep in the trees far out from town, but it seemed like a curiously temporary establishment. You knew that he had never said to himself, "This will be my home for the rest of my life. I will make it as I think a home should be, and I will have the things that please me in it and around

it." You felt that chance had thrown him into its particular walls, and that he had never grown to regard those walls as intimate things in his existence.

His wife was pretty and hospitable. But his hard worrying was contagious, and she had caught the nervous look of his own anxiety. All around us the high hills were serene and quiet. A small wind was in the pines, and the tender hush of evening was upon the world. But in the lighted room where we sat there was no serenity. We talked along by jerks and starts and pauses, until I said to him:

"Tell me what you live by. Tell me ——"

His wife interrupted, with a thin, ironic smile. "We live by a hundred thousand tons of coal a week and a daily chart from the production engineer's office. On Sunday morning we go to church and worship coal. If we ever have a child, I'm going to name the thing Bituminous."

He looked sheepish and grinned. But the grin went away quickly, and he was shaking his head. "Some of these days," he said, "I'm going off to a desert island —"

"Some of these days," I said, "all the world will be nothing but Americans looking for desert islands. You know that is silly. Don't you have anything in your life but coal?"

"I have such a lot of responsibility," he said.

"What do you do for amusement?"

She answered quickly: "Saturday nights, the Bijou. It always seems to be Kay Francis in 'The Man I Loved' — but we go just the same. Once every two weeks, we have dinner with the production engineer and Mrs. Production Engineer — and every other two weeks they dine charmingly with us. It gives everybody a fine chance to talk a little about coal."

He seemed to get a little angry. "Look here, dear, that's a little unfair," he said. "When you come down to it, I guess it's pretty important to get the coal out of the ground and ship it off to the world. It's one of the essentials, anyway. Not like getting all worked up over the production of lipsticks or patented doll babies. Where the devil would the world be if we pooped out on getting the coal? You would realize, soon enough. I've got a job to do and I'm doing it the best I know how, because it seems to be worth doing. That's all."

His self-defense stimulated him, and he flushed, sitting back in his chair with an expression of hurt and slightly belligerent pride.

"And it is necessary," I said, "to give up everything else that you learned in college about living — all the pleasures and the urbanities? Do you ever read anything?"

No. He had no time for reading.

I said, "Now look here. You're a pretty important fellow as we Americans go. You influence a lot of people. The newspapers would print anything you had to say. But you are probably not even aware that some rather grave things are happening in your country. We have about reached the end of an era, in our politics and our economics, our ethics and our culture. A new sort of an arrangement will probably be made, one way or another. Do you know anything about it? Have you any idea what other people are thinking and saying about it? Have you any opinions of your own?"

"I'll get the coal out," he said grimly. "Whatever they do, they'll have to have coal. Let 'em fix it up any way they want to. It doesn't make any difference to me. I've got a job to do."

"Let who fix it up?" I asked.

"People. The country."

"Good lord," I said, "you're a part of the country, aren't you? An important part. You produce the coal. Don't you care what the outcome may be? Haven't you any interest at all in what America does with itself?"

"You," he said, "are another one of those theorists. Always trying to start something. If it wasn't for people like you, the country would go along all right — just drift along and everybody happy."

"Happy as a lark," I said, "hauling up coal out of the ground and dreaming about a desert island."

His wife interrupted that. She wanted me to teach them to play backgammon. She had bought a set of men and a board and thought that if she could get him to play in the evenings it might provide relaxation. So we played backgammon until midnight, and he seemed to enjoy it.

The next day, he turned me over to a man who was to show me through the mines.

He was a huge fellow, this guide, full of drawling Southern talk. He had worked in the pits for ten years — he was forty now — and then he had been walking delegate for a while with one of the miner's unions. Now he worked for a non-union mine. He was a go-between, employed by the corporation but spending most of his time with the men. They could bring disputes and complaints to him, and he would adjust them or pass them on to the executives with his recommendations.

We were talking about miners, on our way out to the pit head.

"You take myself, now," he said. "I went into digging coal from choice. My folks weren't in the mines. The old

man was a furniture merchant, and he wanted me to teach school. Sent me off and made me study. Why, at sixteen, I had my certificate and I was all set to be a professor. But it just didn't appeal to me. I had to have more action than that. I knew there was good money in the mines, and so I quit home and got myself a job digging.

"The first day I walked into that pit and felt all that mountain over my head, I was scared as a jack rabbit. It seemed like the whole thing was caving in, every time anybody dropped a lump of coal somewhere. But you get used to it. You get over your scare. And soon you're just like all the rest of 'em—wouldn't trade your job mining coal for any other job you could think of.

"Do you know where I was at four o'clock this morning? Down Number Four shaft, that's where I was. I had been lying there in bed, and couldn't sleep, and so I just got up and went down where the boys were working. I do that often, too. You get so you ain't happy unless you can be down the shaft, fooling with the coal.

"A miner works hard. Sure, he works. But he works his own way. He goes down, on the day shift for instance, at six o'clock in the morning. All right, he's got one thing to do: cut and load sixteen ton of coal. When he's done that, out he comes. If he wants to work fast, he's out by one o'clock — whole afternoon and night to himself, with nothing to worry about until to-morrow. If he don't feel like rushing, he takes it easy and comes out by three o'clock.

"You see, he's sort of independent—like running his own business. Nobody to tell him how he has to do it. He just does it his own way, and he doesn't have to hang around waiting for the closing-down whistle to blow."

We reached the pit head. There was a big yellow build-

ing, and I know that I was astonished to see the huge banks of scarlet sage and petunias growing in the smooth lawn upon which the building faced.

"We always try to keep it nice," my guide said. "Those flowers don't cost anything but a little work. And everybody likes 'em."

We went in to meet the Superintendent. He was suspicious of me at first. Was I, he wanted to know, one of those snooping fellows, going back to tell a lot of lies about the bad treatment of miners? Was I looking for a tale of woe that would make a lot of old maids come in and start trouble?

I assured him as best I could that I was not.

"The trouble with those people up there—" he vaguely indicated the North, "is that they are soft, soft as babies. They can't realize that a man with guts can work hard and take his punishment and come up feeling pretty good about it. They can't realize that there are some people left in the world who don't mind working and working hard for a living. Now I tell you what you do. You ask my men any kind of questions you want to. If you get one squawk out of them, it will surprise me. That bunch ain't looking for sympathy."

We went into his office and he gave each of us a small brass acetylene lamp that burned with a bright, hissing flame.

My guide led me across a stretch of earth that was cumbered with many narrow rail tracks, toward a low hill a little distance from the building. I had thought, of course, that we would go down a shaft in a cage, but I discovered that this was not to be the case. As we came nearer to the hillside, I saw the mouth of the pit, a low arched opening

that looked very much like the entrance to a railway tunnel. A number of men were lounging about, waiting to go in with the three o'clock shift. They sat and smoked, or fell about in clumsy horseplay, and most of them were still black with yesterday's grime.

We plunged into the side of the hill and found ourselves in a wide, high corridor, thick with gloom and damp with the sweating of the earth. The roof and sides of the corridor were black, shining coal. We could see the bobbing white stars of other lamps, far in the distance ahead. We could see, in the shadows, darker shadows where other tunnels branched off and lost themselves. We could hear the mutter and whine of the electric cutting machines, and the grunt of black powder as it blew the coal down from the working face, far, far off. Once a loaded train came rumbling past — we hugged the side of the tunnel when we saw its blue lights approaching — and once a string of empties went rattling by on its way to the middle of the earth. We turned a curve, and the white speck of daylight that had been behind us disappeared.

We began to pass men who were coming out for the day. Two or three miners going in to work had joined us, and I began to notice something that struck me as a little odd. As we would swim toward an outcoming group in the darkness, everybody would pause, and somebody would say, "Hello, men." The answer would come, "Howdy, men." The incoming miners would say, "How's she going today?" And the answer would be explicit: "Little slow down Number Six. Couldn't get the cars. But we loaded sixteen ton. It's all right."

Then, "Well, guess we'll take a shot at it."

And, "Good luck to you. Good luck."

We met many groups. There was always a stop, and a greeting, and a discussion of the situation. I mean to suggest that the fellowship of these miners was an intense thing, and that their absorption with their chosen trade was just as intense. I never saw one pass another without a salutation and a few words about coal mining.

We were more than a mile from the entrance to the workings now. A mountain was over our head, and still we pressed on deeper. One of the men who had joined up with us began to talk, as we slogged deliberately through the thin film of slime that lay on the floor. He was a lean, tough man of forty. His face was permanently blackened from the coal dust. He spoke in a lazy drawl, but in the illumination from our hissing lamps his eyes were very bright.

"Here's something I don't understand," he said. "We do our work right and we do it honest. I'd rather dig coal than anything else I ever heard of. They're paying us thirty-nine cents a ton for what we bring out, and it's a poor kind of miner that can't get his sixteen ton a day. That's enough money to keep a man from complainin'. But why is it we can't go on all the time like that? Why is it we have to keep worryin' for fear somebody up at Washington or New York will say 'We don't need any more coal — shut down the mines'? Who is it that says that — and why can't they find some way of keeping things runnin'?"

His partner spoke up: "The newspapers don't tell you anything. I'd like to read something to make me understand about all these things. Hard times, they say. But they've got brains up there. Why can't they keep the hard times from coming?"

The first objected to that. "I don't say they can keep the hard times from coming. But they can make us understand the whys and wherefores, can't they? That's all I ask, and everybody in the mine is asking the same thing." He stopped walking and addressed me. "You go back to New York and tell 'em the miners want to understand what's goin' on. We can take the bad times, well as the good, and you won't hear any whining, either. But we ought to know about things. We're part of the country. We're citizens. They ought to take the trouble to learn us what's goin' on."

I told him that I would bear his message back, and they left us with grave courtesy, disappearing in the murk of a transverse tunnel that sheered off abruptly to the right.

We came presently, my huge guide and I, up against a working face where three or four men were cleaning up the odd ends of their day's labor, shoring the roof with heavy timbers and tapping it to discover if it were solid. One of the men was very young, twenty-two or thereabouts, and my guide went up to him.

"How you making it, Bud?" he asked.

The boy grinned. He had a pleasant face, even behind the accumulated grime. "I got sixteen ton," he said. "I could have got four more if they'd sent down another empty for me."

"You married?" asked the guide.

"Yeah. Live over at Gypsy."

I had seen the village called Gypsy: a little huddle of two-room houses, built more than thirty years ago. It was primitive and unlovely.

The guide nodded toward me and spoke to the boy. "It's all right for you to talk to this man," he said. "He wants to ask you some questions."

I asked, "Any children?"

"Two," he said. "Two boys."

"Going to put them in the mine when they grow up?"

He shook his head and laughed. "I sort of figure on making a doctor out of that oldest one. Mines are good enough for me, but not for him. I'll get the other one some education, too. You've got to have education, I guess, to know where you're headin'." He made a vague gesture that encompassed the dark tunnel, the hilltop that hung over our heads, the world at large.

"Do you know where you're heading?" I asked him.

He looked at the guide. "I'm taking the engineering course two nights a week at the community hall, from that professor who comes up to the mines from the University." The statement seemed to cause him some embarrassment, and he grinned wider than ever. "The wife makes me take it. But I don't want to leave the mines. It's good work."

The glare of the little lamps made our shadows dance grotesquely on the black walls as we nodded our heads and moved our hands.

"What would you rather do than anything else in the world?" I asked him.

The question was so odd to him that he asked to have it repeated. Then he thought for several minutes. "I guess," he said, "I'd rather be the boss of a coal mine than anything else." We all laughed.

He joined us for the long walk out to the sunlight, to the trees on the gentle hillsides and the floods of daisies that were everywhere among the grass. But he talked very little. And, curiously enough, I did not feel like asking him

questions about himself. For all his ingenuous youth, there was an inescapable dignity about him that made intimate questions about his life somehow unseemly. But I did ask him: "Tell me — what are you going to do to-night? What will you do when you get home?"

That seemed to amuse him a great deal — chiefly, I think, because he couldn't think of a simple answer. "Why," he said, "I'll frolic with the kids awhile. The wife will tell me a lot of gossip about the other women, and we'll eat a snack. Then I'll hang around with the boys a while and chin. What makes you ask me a thing like that?"

I said it was just curiosity. The guide said, "You ought to see our boys on a Sunday, when they get cleaned up and put on regular clothes. You wouldn't know 'em. They look like Broadway, or Fifth Avenue, or any other place. How about it, Bud?" And Bud laughed his agreement. "Only trouble is," he said, "there ain't anywhere to go to show off. Everybody you see knows you belong in a pair of overalls with a lot of smut all over you. I'm going up to one of those big cities some day. New York or Philadelphia. They'll want to look out for a tough miner, when I get to town."

He left us and began his three-mile walk home. We gave our lamps back to the Superintendent, and my guide said, "I want to show you a different kind of mine now. One of the independents. All the trouble we ever have in this country starts with those little independent workings, and most of them are unionized, too. You can't blame the men. The operators promise a scale and then don't pay it. They make the people live in bad houses. They run short little seasons, and a man never can tell when he quits at

night whether he'll go to work in the morning or get notice."

We drove down a long, winding dirt road. Here and there a black ledge of coal jutted like some vast rock from the side of the hills, and my guide said, "That's all coal. Enough coal in this valley to last two hundred years at the present rate. The surveyors have found that much."

The way led past little clumps of houses that grew more and more dreary to the eye, until at last we came to the dreariest and the shabbiest of all. It hung on the edge of a shallow river, with a great mountain looming over the roofs that sagged with age. A little way off the black, square tower of the pit head stood up from the earth, old and rotten and incredibly harsh against the pines.

Operation at the mine had been suspended for more than two weeks. A few people moved about. They went slowly, with bent heads, as if they were suffering from a profound weariness. We glanced into one or two of the houses and saw people sitting — merely sitting and staring out silently at the road. There was a store at the end of the village. It was unpainted, gray with weather. The railing of its porch had rotted and tumbled away. On the low stoop five or six men were sitting. They observed our approach sullenly. But my guide, familiar with their ways, greeted them with casual politeness. Slowly and with great difficulty we finally got a halting conversation under way.

A young and very sturdy man said, "We've been hard up before, ain't we? It ain't nothing remarkable, is it?" He spoke with the slowest possible drawl. "I say, the ones that whine ain't got any backbone nohow."

With all the tact of which I was capable, I skirted the

question of radicalism. What was the feeling, I asked, about those Communist people?

An elderly man who had not bothered to wash his black face since the work stopped answered for them. "We had one of those fellows coming through here last week. He got out quick enough. I guess we can get along a while yet with the Constitution of the United States. Some powerful snakes are living under it. I admit that. But you couldn't scotch the snakes by tearing up the Constitution. Could you now? Answer me that?"

I said, "No."

He said, "We ain't interested in no revolution. We are interested in having honest and decent men own the mines. Not snakes. I guess the country's still all right."

Another man said, "But you don't go singing no 'Star Spangled Banner' when you got hungry women and young 'uns sitting in the cabin."

Nobody answered that, and we were all silent for a little while. It seemed curiously melodramatic, and also intensely sad, to hear the whining of a baby from a house not far away.

I had observed that there was no church along the road we had come and I spoke of it. "It seems," I said, "that you would get a lot of comfort, and good advice too, out of your religion when things go bad like this. Isn't there a meetinghouse anywhere near?"

The storekeeper laughed with a sour harshness. He was a grizzled ancient, and his convictions were obviously very strong on all matters. "Nobody listens to preachers any more," he said. "Who cares about hell-fire, or heaven either, when his belly's empty? Some of the women folks complain because there ain't no Sunday school for the

young 'uns. But there's nothing the preachers have got to say for grown-up men. No, sir. We ain't got to the point yet where we got to holler for help from on high. We can manage a while longer, anyhow. Ain't that right, men?" He laughed acidly.

The others nodded and spoke in quick agreement. One of them had a little tobacco, and he passed it around until all the pipes were filled. He threw the empty package away. I must have made some unconscious gesture, or perhaps my face showed what I was thinking. For he turned with slow deliberation and looked at me. "And we don't need no pity, neither." His voice was harsh in its intensity, and after he spoke there was complete silence. It was not broken, even when my guide and I told them good-by and walked slowly back to the car.

I shall not forget my last glimpse of them as I looked behind and saw them still motionless upon that tattered stoop. The twilight was deepening. The mountain had changed to a vast purple shadow. A few stars were faintly visible in the remote sky. In that fading light the men were ghostly figures, gray and still, with a little smoke rising from their pipes. I felt, for a few moments, a small, cold terror.

Thus it happened that among the miners I came upon several explicit things. The most important of these, to me, was the profound courage that they are able to match against adversity. I know, also, that they want to know a good deal more about existence, about the forces that play upon their quiet and unassuming lives. Through all the coal country, courage and the dim desire for knowledge run like a refrain — these and the uninterested reply, "No, there is nothing for us in the churches."

A month or two later, as it happened, I was talking about the coal miners to an educator — a quite celebrated educator he was, as well known for his liberalism as for his learning. He lives in Wisconsin.

"It is depressing," he said, "to recognize what they really want. Economic security, that is all. Give them their thirty-nine cents a ton, sixteen tons a day without lay-offs, and they're contented to be stupid coal miners for the rest of their lives."

"What do you want them to be?" I asked. "Something other than coal miners?"

"Something other than stupid coal miners," he said.

I said, "You are able to fall back upon that lovely detachment which is responsible for most of our noble sentiments in America. You can be detached and build your excellent theories for the simple reason that you have never seen a coal miner. In the first place, they are not stupid at all. Uneducated, perhaps, but not fools. And in the second place, economic security is not such a silly aim in life."

He said, "They are virtually slaves."

I said, "They are about as close to slavery as a freeman gets to be, but the fact remains that they are still freemen. They believe that they are in the coal pits entirely of their own volition. Ninety-nine out of a hundred will tell you that they like being in the coal pits."

"Nobody but a stupid man could possibly like it."

"Please, now," I said. "Every civilization of any consequence has reached its pinnacles on the backs of slaves — slaves of one sort or another. One foot of our particular civilization happens to stand on coal. The men who produce it are slaves, as you say — but I don't think they are stupid slaves. They are not as stupid, for instance, as the

soldiers of the Roman legions. It seems to me they are entirely justified in wanting economic security, or, failing in that, an adequate explanation of its denial to them. If one or the other isn't given to them, they might even tire of their slavery."

"That would be the perfect outcome," he said. "Can't you see? They *should* get tired of it and free themselves."

"And come marching out of the coal pits," I said. "The steam turbines would stop running, the trains and the ships ——"

"Excellent!" he said.

"You're a professional liberal," I said, "looking for some lovely excitement. For my part, I prefer for them to stay in the coal mines, which they really want to do anyway, and be given a certain meed of education, and so permit the civilization, such as it is, to get on. Even in your perfect State, you know, somebody will have to dig coal out of the ground. We live in that sort of climate. And these people seem more competent at it than anybody else I know."

"You are willing," he said, "for them to remain submerged — laboring for somebody else's profit."

"And for their own contentment," I argued. "You see, it's like that Superintendent said. There are some men left in the world who really do not mind hard work. But they should receive sure pay for it and at least a crumb from the world's store of knowledge."

· 3 ·

Pittsburgh is first a dark smudge on the horizon, then a long boulevard that skirts the slums where the workmen

live, then a forest of blackened buildings that lose themselves in the eternal murk above.

It is a curious city and an anomalous one. It is the blazing crucible of the Iron Empire, full of fierce and dangerous labor and the savage passions of the laborers — and it is also the center of American painting, the fountainhead of Andrew Carnegie's ambitious plan for the enrichment of the American mind. The Cathedral of Learning is a tall Gothic spire, a new thirty-million-dollar home for the University of Pittsburgh — and to the ears of its topmost gargoyles, staring out upon the heaped gob piles, comes the mutter of a hundred alien languages. There are six or seven fashionable hunt clubs, with ladies and gentlemen riding to hounds on fine mornings with an excellent simulation of the English manner — and over at McKee's Rocks the hunkies read their hunky newspapers and wrestle over nickel beer with the sublime problems of European diplomacy. Through the doors of the handsome library and the art museum, the wives of these same hunkies pour in an utterly incredible stream, hugging gingham dresses to their deep breasts and staring at pictures, borrowing books to read.

Thus the city is a miracle of harsh contrasts, of confusion in bold black and white. The middle-class ingredient is thin. There is the slenderest possible proportion of that steadying and workaday mediocrity which the world lives by. Great riches and extreme poverty, and virtually nothing in between.

I went to see a professor of social economy at the University. He was high up in the Gothic tower, in a snug, small room.

"If you had come to-morrow," he said, "the cage would have been empty."

"Going away?" I asked.

"Permanently," he said. "Fired. But it's no distinction, I assure you. A lot of us are being weeded out. You see, when a few men put up thirty million dollars for a new college building, they have a good deal to say about the faculty. Pittsburgh millionaires, as you might guess, are conservatives. More interested in the *status quo* than in the humanities. So out we go."

"What was the sin?" I asked.

"I made a survey of social conditions," he said. "That is my job, of course — but I suppose it was a little foolish to do the job so thoroughly. I never published the survey, but somebody heard that it hardly reflected credit upon the leaders of the community."

"What's the matter with the town?" I asked. "It gives a queer impression, somehow. As if — as if there were a blight upon it."

"The blight of the feudal system," he said. "The town is debauched.

"Look here, now," he went on. "A small handful of men dominate everything in Pittsburgh: banking, industry, real estate, government — everything. You can call that little handful the feudal lords and Pittsburgh the barony. The lords have power enough and money enough to make any kind of city they might happen to want. What have they accomplished?

"Well, government. We have what is called the Greater Pittsburgh Area — a metropolitan district. For all practical purposes, that is the city you see when you look out of

my beautifully arched window, for the streets are continuous and there is nothing to show where one town leaves off and another begins. All right. How many separate governments? About a hundred and twenty. A hundred and twenty towns and boroughs and divisions. A hundred and twenty taxing and judicial and election and police units. The result, of course, is political corruption that makes Tammany seem like a lamb. They make any sort of trade that suits them, steal anything that lies about loose, and they don't even bother to cover up their tracks. Once in a while we have to prosecute a mayor for stealing an election or a judge for selling his decisions, but nothing much ever really happens.

"And would you like some figures on the distribution of wealth? The city proper — the municipality of Pittsburgh, that is to say — has a population of about half a million. By the most liberal estimate I can make, something more than two hundred thousand of these live in the most terrible slums in the world. And, for contrast, there are in one area in the East End eleven hundred families with an annual gross income of sixty-four million dollars.

"Oh, of course, I was foolish to make such a survey as that. But I was interested.

"I invite you to inspect the slums. You will not enjoy your tour, but it will be enlightening. And then inspect our centers of culture. The barons have spent millions — money pouring like water — on museums for paintings, or international art contests that bring the most celebrated artists of the world to our feet, on colleges and libraries and hospitals. Nobody but a Philistine would quarrel with that, of course. But, alas, the barons have never spent a

dollar to improve the living conditions of the despised poor.

"You have to remember the original Pittsburgh — a pleasant town full of wise, conscientious, church-going Scots and Irishmen. Pioneers of American industry, they were. They put up the blast furnaces and began to make steel. They cunningly imported cheap labor from Middle Europe. When they did that they sowed the wind — and now the hordes you will see in the slums are the whirlwind."

Evening had come on while he talked. He flicked on a desk lamp and looked at me rather curiously. "How's your stomach?" he asked abruptly.

"Strong," I said.

"Come on," he said. We got our hats and went down to the street. We walked a few blocks, and a Salvation Army band was playing loudly. We walked on, and in ten minutes we moved within the ambit — and out again — of four or five lean men with gleaming eyes who cried in troubled phrases the glories of the Gospel, the terrors of the retribution that is prepared for the sinful of the earth.

We went up The Hill. We turned down a narrow alley, dark and full of murmurous sound, and the cobblestones were rough under our feet.

"Part of my survey," said my companion.

In the first house at which we stopped there were about twenty girls. Some of them were very pretty and all of them were still young. And that description held fairly true for all the hundred and ninety-two similar establishments at which we called in the space of two square blocks.

I am not a sentimentalist nor oversqueamish. But the degradation that I came upon in that tour was blunt, de-

liberate degradation, and it was a little unsettling. I talked to a number of those girls. They were bland and frank and, so far as I could discover, quite happy. One of them, I remember, was about seventeen — leaning forward from a divan where she sat in a flimsy shift and staring at me with childish curiosity out of clear blue eyes.

"Well, what would you do?" she said. "You marry one of those boys in the mills and live over there and be poor. Or you come over here and marry a lot of 'em. What's the difference? When I'm thirty, I'll be sitting pretty with money in the bank, this way. If I married one of those boobs, I'd be a pretty sight at thirty, wouldn't I?"

I asked, "What does your father do?"

"In the mills," she said. "He's a roller. Do you think I want to be like my old lady is now? She came over to see me the other day. You ought to've been here when I gave her a new dress. First one she'd had in a year, and she was like a kid with a new toy."

"What does she think of this?" I asked, waving my hand to include herself, and the room, and the lounging figures all about.

"What has she got to do with it?" the girl answered.

I said, "You're Hungarian, aren't you?"

"Bohemian," she corrected. "Just plain Bohunk," and she laughed with exuberant gaiety.

On the street, the university man said to me, "We will pass up the rest. There is one block of negresses — white men only admitted — and there's about half a block of white girls for the exclusive entertainment of colored gentlemen. Nice, hunh?"

We went into a joint for a glass of beer. It was squalid — the best he knew, he said — and the beer was bad.

Fifty or sixty men were lounging at the tables covered with yellow oilcloth. Among them were two or three policemen in uniform. The radio was getting a short-wave program from London — the chanting of some cathedral choir — and everybody was interested. We bought some whisky but were quite unable to drink it.

When I left him, I went by the office of the Scripps-Howard newspaper. The three papers in Pittsburgh are all members of national chains. There is no locally owned paper. It has been my experience with the Scripps papers that they are likely to have energy and healthy devotion to truth and justice, even when they allow their excitements to run away with them. This was true in Pittsburgh, at least.

"We had that fellow's survey," said one of the editors, when I mentioned my college acquaintance. "Started to print it, but you couldn't do that. You'd have two hundred thousand hunkies marching across the river and tearing down the city hall if they knew the truth. They stay pretty hungry a lot of the time. It wouldn't do any good to tell them how rich other people are."

I said, "What are you campaigning for?" because I felt sure a Scripps paper must be campaigning for something.

He shook his head. "It's got me beat," he said. "You see, the essence of a campaign is to get the solid, self-respecting, middle-class people on your side — make 'em shake off their apathy and take hold of things. That's what you call cracking a town open — the sweetest job in the newspaper business — when the honest, home-loving citizens get indignant and kick the demagogues out with a 'Star Spangled Banner' and a Hip, Hip, Hurray. . . .

"But it doesn't work in Pittsburgh. You don't have any-

body to work on. The honest, home-loving, middle-class boobs couldn't get control, even if all of them got together for one combined effort. There just ain't enough of 'em. And there's no use putting it up to the hunkies. They can't read English in the first place, and it wouldn't do to get them excited in the second place. They might not know when to stop."

"What's the answer?" I asked.

He picked up his long, spindly legs and put them on top of his cluttered desk. He lit a fresh cigarette with fingers that were full of yellow stain. He shook his head with lugubrious slowness.

"Fellow," he said, "there is no answer. Go ahead and call us a sink hole and a cesspool — call us a natural among American cities, a skeleton in the cupboard of the great Democracy. And if anybody wants to know more than that about our desolate iniquity, suggest that he read the nine-volume report on the same as published by the Russell Sage Foundation."

The telephone bell rang. There was a killing in Duquesne that had to be covered. He got busy, and I left.

The next day I went to the steel mills. I rode on a street car across a dark and oily river fringed with smoking stacks and went to Braddock. I got off the street car some distance from the mill and walked among the houses where the steel workers live.

For the most part, those houses were two low stories in height, built of bricks, their doorways flush with the sidewalks. They were very old. The sidewalks were littered with filth that seemed to overflow from the doorways, and a low, brawling clamor filled the air. At intervals along the street, alleys opened off. They were like *culs-de-sac*, closed

at the far end, and forty or fifty houses stood in each. I remember the children playing in the dirt: black children and white, brown and dirty gray, bickering irritably — and high above them the figures of the women, bending down over them like brooding colossi, ragamuffins with streaming hair and shapeless clothing and desperate voices. A good many men were about too, for some of the work was shut down and they were idle. But they took no part in the domestic scene. They sat, or stood against the walls, or walked with a slowness that was terribly funereal and oppressive, their dark eyes on the pavement and their vast hands hanging like sacks of meal at their sides. At a corner store, three or four such men were congregated, and I spoke to them — asking for a match, going through with all the conventional devices for approaching strangers before I asked if they were citizens of the United States. All but one. And how were they making it? Tough. What were the prospects? A shrug.

I said, "Have you tried to think of a way out of it?" I indicated the mill fence, a little way off, and the street where we were standing. The youngest of the men gazed at me placidly. "Are you trying to preach something?" he asked. I said, "No. I haven't thought of anything that would be worth preaching. I was wondering if you had."

No. They hadn't. That ended it, and I walked on.

I had a note from the downtown office to the plant superintendent, and he turned me over to an inspector. The inspector was a man of fifty or thereabouts, small, dour, taciturn at first. He got up from a dusty little desk and said we would look at the blast furnaces first.

While we were walking across the huge, cluttered yard, I was still thinking about those houses down the street and

the men I had seen. I had not looked very carefully at my guide. I said, a little offhand, "Can you tell me about the steel workers — what sort of people they are and what they live by?"

He was quite furious, in a contained way. He stopped short in his stride and looked at me. "You talk about steel workers," he said, "as if they were some species of animal. — 'How do wildcats live?'

"Two hundred thousand steel workers means two hundred thousand men, d' ye see? There's as much difference in habits and money and brains and morals among steel workers as among two hundred thousand men anywhere. Some of 'em are scoundrels and live like scoundrels. Most of 'em know all there is to know about being poor, but some of 'em have money put away. Some of 'em are interested in educating themselves and their children, and some of 'em are bloody murderers at heart, looking for a chance to stick a knife into anybody. Do you understand, now, how steel workers live?"

That was a chastening rebuke. I apologized, and he began to tell me about the blast furnace. We were looking at one now. It towered over us like some monstrous retort, and the air was thick with the acrid fumes of its breathing. I was surprised that so few men were operating it — only a handful, who jerked at levers. Great noises reverberated in the core of the furnace. The men seemed very small and trivial alongside their immense contrivance for making pig iron out of ore.

We watched until they let the furnace off — until the great mass of molten stuff within its walls was cooked to the exactly perfect pitch. We stood back, and a small black figure high up among the valves pulled a lever, and a

terrible detonation shook the earth. Flames leaped to the sky, men were hurrying, and a long snake of melted iron, hissing and bubbling, crept down a stone trough into the molds. The world was suffused with a profound and awful melodrama.

We walked away, and my guide said, "It's something you never get used to. You never know exactly what's going to happen. We don't lose many men on the blast furnaces, but you never know. . . ."

We went into a gigantic shed, filled with a deafening clamor. The open hearth furnaces choked the air with deadly heat, and although here again the number of men at work was surprisingly small for the vast operations in progress, we could not seem to get out of their way. The movement of machines was constant — cranes and hoists and rumbling small cars that rolled on twisting tracks. The noise rose and fell in an infernal cadence. I had the feeling of a man defending himself against a murderous attack: as if deadly things, mysterious and inanimate, were converging from every side.

A man opened the door of one of the ovens. He pulled at a few levers, and a long, coffin-shaped receptacle moved by electricity into the opened door. It was filled, we could see, with iron ore. That ore was the last ingredient of the brew, for when the receptacle had turned itself over and dumped its load, when the door clanged shut and the gas fire was turned on, the man sat down to rest and to watch his fantastic cooking. We watched also, and the heat grew all around us like something palpable in the air.

My guide said, "The heat in that furnace will go to 3200 degrees, Fahrenheit. It is making steel. Another furnace, down the line, is about ready to run. Come on."

We went to the back of the long row of furnaces. The cranes were moving. Huge objects swung slowly and ruthlessly through the air. We came along a little platform and stood watching the back of a furnace. Two men were pecking at it with a little iron bar. It seemed almost ludicrously futile. But I began to understand what they were doing.

Inside the furnace, the steel was liquid and white hot. In the back wall of the furnace there was a vent hole, stopped now with a mixture of clay and sand. The men were picking the clay and sand away, to open the vent hole and let the steel pour out.

"Sometimes they are careless," said my guide, "and it spurts. That's fatal."

They dug away the stopper until only a thin inch of the powdery stuff was between them and the fierce thing inside. Then they stepped away and got a blowtorch ready.

Meantime, one of the cranes had been moving toward us. It was carrying an iron bucket through the air — such a bucket as you have never seen, for it would hold twenty-four tons of melted steel. It fell slowly into place before the spout, and the long blue flame of the blowtorch leaped toward its target. There was a sudden mutter and a rushing of air. Heat fell upon us like a solid thing. The air was filled with a light that was blinding, and the steel was pouring out. It was a dazzling stream, nearly a foot thick, and as it fell into the bucket the ground trembled.

I looked at the men who had released it. They stood like gnomes, half-naked, drenched with the sweat that gleamed upon them. It did not seem credible that they belonged to the same species as myself — as people who peck at typewriters, or croon into the microphones of the

radio, or put gasoline into automobile tanks at filling stations.

We went on. We saw, in all, six thousand men, with the heat of the steel burning fiercely into their faces, with the weight of the steel cording the muscles of their backs and their arms. All around them was the threat of a terrifying death. All around them was immediate and urgent conflict, noise and fire and brutish tons of steel.

Presently, we were again in the open air, and I was a little breathless.

"Do you see now," he said, "why it is quite impossible to get these men excited over governments and the ways of civilization? Those things seem so tame to them, after a day's work. But when the work stops, and they get hungry. . . " He shook his head.

I said, "I remember reading somewhere — some sociologist wrote in a report I saw — that any man of the third generation in the steel mills is mentally and morally and physically ruined. I could believe that, off-hand. There is something crushing about their work — overpowering — "

I saw that he was smiling rather curiously, and I waited until he was ready to speak. "My grandfather," he said, "was a steel roller. My father was a steel roller. He died when he was sixty, one night after he got home from work. I was a steel roller too, until I was twenty-nine. Then they promoted me to this job. My son is eighteen. He entered West Point this term. He wants to be a poet."

I said, "That's an odd place to educate a poet."

He said, "I wanted him to get his discipline. I didn't want him to get it in the mills, but he had to have it. They won't hurt his poetry."

I said, "You are pretty well educated. How did that happen? How did you come up out of that after two generations?" And I nodded toward the booming shed.

He could give no real answer. He had never been to school very much — grade school until he was fifteen and then to work. Somewhere in that early youth he had come upon the science of economics, picked up a book and read it. "I read Adam Smith and Karl Marx," he said, "when it was a crime to be caught at it. I can remember sneaking off to my room. But I have wondered about that sometimes myself. What made a grubby little Scotch boy go off and try to get himself educated? Nobody else bothered about it. Nobody I knew then was trying to learn. I've often thought it was sort of odd."

We went back into his grimy little office, full of the echoes of the work outside, and he drew a small piece of paper out of his desk. "Can I talk to you privately for a minute?" he said. "I mean, I'm not your guide at the steel mill and you're not hunting for notes."

I said, "Certainly. What is it?"

He handed me the paper, and there were some verses written on it. "Read it," he said, "and let me know what you think of it."

The verses were headed "The Song of Steel." I read them:

> We are descendants of Vulcan the Forger,
> Grandsons of old Tubal Cain,
> Sons of the men who made swords at Damascus,
> Kin to the smelters of ancient Spain,
> Tracing our lineage back through the ages
> When mythical gods made war on our sires,
> Back where the gods dealing death and disaster
> Cast down their bolts bringing iron in their fires.

We are the heirs of their knowledge and prowess,
Handed from history's dawn;
Heirs to their methods, their skill and their practice
And heirs to their strength, with pride in our brawn.
Furnacemen, blowers, melters and pitmen,
Handling a shovel, a lever or peel,
Heaters and rollers, straighteners or loaders,
All of us mighty men, bit through with steel.

We are the makers of civilization,
Progress is measured by steel:
Steel for the tools of farmers or surgeons,
Plowshare or lancet or automobile,
Buildings and bridges, cannon and shrapnel,
Tubing or rails or a steamship's keel —
We, the descendants of Vulcan the Forger
Take pride in our calling and boast of our steel.

I looked up. I said, "It's pretty good. How did you happen to write it?"

He said, "My son wrote something about a Song of Steel. I told him he couldn't do it. He didn't know anything about it. He never put a rail through the rolls. I told him I would do it. Does it sound all right?"

I said, "I'm going to print it."

He was upset by that. "I wouldn't want it printed," he said. "It wouldn't do for the boys that work under me to know I was writing rhymes."

But he finally agreed, on the condition that I not print his name. Then we just sat there looking at each other for a few minutes. I said, with a gesture toward the furnaces, and the slums, and the city's towers looming on the smoky horizon, "None of that can bother you very much, can it?" He shook his head, slowly and thoughtfully. And I knew I had met one man at least in all those toiling hordes who had discovered the single anchor to the good life, the anchor of resources within himself that

could never be spent by the change and flow of circumstances, the reel of uncertain affairs. He understood, I think, what was in my mind, for he said, "There are a good many like that, more than you would think, in the two hundred thousand you put such a pat name upon a while ago."

· 4 ·

From Pittsburgh the road wound westward through Ohio, through the farming country that lies in all the interstices of the Iron Empire. It was beautiful country, incalculably rich-looking to the eye, and it had the patina of living upon its face, the touch of hands that have groomed the soil and nurtured it even while they were taking sustenance from it. Upon its open, rolling fields were herds and the rich green of the coming harvest and solid homes half-hidden by old trees. The country went swiftly by the car window, and there was a feeling of certainty that men can never really hunger while such earth is waiting to give up its fruits — a feeling of wonder that men with strong bodies should live in the squalor of a Pittsburgh slum when here was open land, the smell of earth, the simple and satisfying rewards of husbandry.

I stopped at a little town and went to the home of the publisher of a weekly newspaper. It was a pleasant home. The living room was half full of books that were tempting to the eye and the hand. There were comfortable lamps, and on the walls a number of excellent color prints. Over the mantel was a portrait of the editor's Confederate grandfather in a superb fighting pose, his hand in a sling and a long Colt pistol slung across his breast.

The editor talked about politics. He was very blue, it

seemed, about the prospects of victory for the Republican party, and that filled him with an acute malaise. He dwelt for more than an hour among the intricacies of party machinery — how those scoundrels in the state convention had outsmarted his crowd — how he was sure to get his candidate for Congressman over, regardless of the vote for President — how the National Committee was blundering at every step, and what clever tricks the Democrats were using. He showed me an editorial he had printed in his last issue. It was a long and involved harangue on some subtlety of political maneuvering to get votes — and it was utterly lost upon me.

I said, "It's a great game, politics."

"Greatest game in the world," he said.

I said, "The only trouble about it is that it seems to affect people's lives so very little. The way you fellows play it, it is all a lot of abstractions — movements of pawns and castles — never seems to get down to the place where people actually live."

He said he didn't understand, quite, what I meant.

I said, "Everything you've been telling me, everything you said in that editorial — it's interesting, I guess, but how in the world does it affect people, human beings? Perhaps I'm stupid, but I just don't understand how any of it really means anything."

He laughed. "Lord, man," he said, "I guess you don't understand much about the American citizen. Politics is in his blood, same as the love of liberty, and he had rather talk about it than eat when he's hungry. Just plain politics, I mean: the game, the inside stuff. They would still walk ten miles to hear a silver-tongued orator sound the trump, and not care a nickel whether he said anything sensible or

not, as long as he said it pretty. When you come right down to it, I don't guess anybody cares very much who gets elected or what happens down in Washington. Government don't interest them very much. But politics does. Mark the difference. They love the game. It's the oldest tradition we've got — American love of politics for its own sake, and a good roaring campaign."

I had the faint notion that all this had a good deal of nonsense in it. I was still fresh on my journey and I had not seen a vast number of Americans. But of those I had seen, nobody wanted to talk politics. At least, not that kind of politics: the strategy of warring factions, the cunning of the party leaders, or how that grand old warrior Senator White put the bee on Senator Black and stole his own county away from him. And I also had the notion that a considerable number of other romantic traditions in our country are hanging on just because the people who write for newspapers and make speeches — the enormous number of people engaged in the production of glittering generalities about America — say that they are hanging on. I came back to my growing belief that in politics, as in most other manifestations of their lives, Americans are made to appear quite different from the people they really are. In politics, as in most other manifestations of their lives, the superstructure conceals the foundation, the legends and the catchwords go before the truth.

Let us take the simple matter of passing laws in legislative bodies — the establishment of the national policies and the national personality. It is easy enough to see how traditions endure and seem to be full of vitality. Let us say that John Jones decides he would like to be a Congressman. Now all of us would assume offhand, upon hear-

ing of such a decision, that John Jones is a second-rate or a third-rate man to begin with. We know, really, that first-rate men do not very often decide to be Congressmen.

Yet, even with his second-rate mind, John Jones has ideas. He has a genuine feeling for the people of his district. He has some fine plans for making their lives better and happier, and he is pretty close to their actual problems. He is, in short, full of fine, vague dreams and he is also full of courage.

He is either a Democrat or a Republican, and he confers with the leaders of his party. They are delighted, we may assume, that John wants to be a Congressman. But, they tell him, he has a lot to learn. Politics is a queer game. You have to take it mighty easy at first, until you learn the ropes. So they begin to teach John the ropes — most of the ropes leading to votes that must be snared. He has some ideas of his own about that. Perhaps he believes that he can really get votes by simply standing up on his hind legs and saying what he believes — knowing that these beliefs will be welcome in the hustings. But the leaders smile benignly. They had to learn their lesson, from other leaders now dead. John must learn the tricks of the trade.

A little against his will, he learns the tricks. The leaders seem so very sure about it. But while he is learning the tricks, and practicing them, a few of his fine dreams have to be jettisoned. A little of his forceful individuality goes by the board.

Well, John is elected. He says to himself, "I had to be a politician to get the votes. But now I'm in. And when I get down to Washington, I'll have no more compromises with the things I believe. I'm going to give my constituents what I know will be best for them."

But, in the halls of Congress, John is rendered a little timid by all the experience and all the *savoir faire* that he encounters. He has an instinctive desire to follow the old heads until he really gets on to himself — just as the cub reporter and the rookie salesman and the freshly hatched editorial writer and the new college professor are a little timid of their bold, secret dreams in the presence of an established, smooth-working pattern of conduct. The floor leader checks John down for an Aye or a No on some vote without even asking his permission. If he still has the brashness to protest against that, he is greeted with a tolerant smile and an assurance that it will not happen again. But he seems to see people grinning at him from cloak-room corners, and he hears the faint whisper, "Jones? Oh, yes, one of the boys with big ideas." And a whispered chuckle. An old head drops in on him one day and tells him a long story — the story of all the bright young fellows who have come up to set Congress on fire, and how in every case the fire turned into a small, embarrassing fizzle.

"We old heads," says the old head, "have had a lot of experience with this game. We've got some fine plans for the country. You ought to be participating in them, my boy, and giving the weight of your youth and strength to the Big Schemes that are being worked out. You'd like to be on committees, wouldn't you? Maybe a chairmanship, some day. You'd like to have the confidence of the party. . . ."

The fresh voice is stilled. The old traditions hold sway. John Jones, before he knows it, is changed from a 1932 Congressman into an 1886 Congressman. And the people

back home are saying, "Our Congressman? Let's see — Jones is his name, I think. Jones or Smith, some common name like that. But I don't care anything about the Congressman. Washington is a long way off. They go down there and forget everything they said in the campaign. They are just swallowed up by the Government down there and forget all about the folks at home who voted for 'em."

This is no facile projection, inserted to make a point. It is, I assure you, almost exactly the speech that I heard from more than a hundred men in widely separated parts of the land when I asked the question, "What about your Congressman? What is your feeling about him?"

The feeling about him is that he does not represent his constituency at all — that he does not translate into terms of government the thoughts and the desires of the people who elected him.

Beneath the gusty romanticism of being an American citizen, as sung by my country editor and by countless other editors everywhere, there is a stirring, I think, of the realism of being an American citizen. It has little enough chance to crystallize itself and become a potent thing, because all the articulate people — or nearly all — cling with a stubborn and slightly stupid nostalgia to the gallant and charming legends of the past. Shyly, however, with neither the boldness, the facility, nor the opportunity for saying so out loud, an extraordinary number of people are beginning to know that the legends are old-fashioned and worthless — that we live by them hardly at all — that our persistent worship of them is a rather silly pretense. I am not brash enough to prophesy what will come next:

whether it will be rationalism or merely a new set of legends. But I think the signs are up, and that an era is moving toward its close.

· 5 ·

Springfield, in Ohio, is a manufacturing city set in the midst of lovely fields. I went there, and in a fine old room in a fine old house I heard one of the manufacturers tell lightly of his ruin. The decline of business had cost him a plant that had been in the family for two generations. The settlement of his debts had cost him his home. He had moved with his family into his mother's home.

He was full of optimism and he was quite happy, but his optimism did not turn at all upon the hope that his dollars would be recovered. He felt sure that they would not, that his wealth was permanently gone.

"But that's just the point," he said. "Nothing could have taught me so much as having that money and losing it. In every way, it is a marvelous relief to be poor. I know now — though I never suspected it before — that I was tired of paying out money to get things that I really did not want. I was a mark for every salesman and every advertisement that I saw. I bought an enormous number of things, but now I know they were not really luxuries. I was a slave to everything I owned, from my pocket cigarette lighter to my new automobile. I spent half my time trying to keep all that machinery in working order.

"I think, now, a lot of people feel just about as I do. They piled up money and bought things with it. Now they are deprived of those things, and instead of feeling blue, they feel that an enormous number of irritating little

burdens are lifted from them. More than that, they realize that the mere ability to buy such things was a poor reward for all the pain that went into making a fortune. It just wasn't worth that much effort. All it did was to complicate life. It didn't make life any more comfortable or pleasant.

"We were like kids with money in our pockets. The money was burning a hole. Now we're growing up.

"That is what makes me optimistic. We're coming into some sort of maturity. We're discovering that most of the goals we fought for were pretty foolish, because now that they are taken away from us we're glad of it. We had a country full of wealthy, miserable people, bored and disillusioned by the rewards of money. Next time, they may be able to think of some sensible use for it."

Now I quite agree with you that there was some confusion in what he was trying to say. But it was not, I think, stupid confusion. Rather, it was the awkwardness of a mind grown rusty. Making and spending money had not made him think very much, and now he was contemplating for the first time in his existence the implications of wealth. Theretofore, wealth had been simply a matter of fact with him. He had never felt it necessary to look at himself and say, "Here, now. You've got this much money. How are you going to use it to make yourself a happier man — to make your wife and your children happier?" He had never felt it necessary to define for himself or for his family an approach to life, a way of living. He had simply bought whatever was offered for sale, according to the vague national belief that all contentment lies in the ability to purchase. With all that theory of living put forcibly behind him by the evaporation of his ability to purchase, he was at least able to look back upon it and

know that it was a dull and unsatisfying and trifling way to fill out the years. He at least knew perfectly well that he was not whining after a past that was in all truth a bore.

I doubt that this particular man will ever try to accumulate another fortune. I think that there are many, once wealthy, who will not go through with the grinding stress of becoming wealthy again. The prizes that they gained from riches were too empty. On the other hand, they may attempt something else. People of such inherent energy demand a specific end for their labors. In the past, our country has seen nearly all such energy spent in the acquisition of money. We have now a considerable number of men who have sensed, like my Springfield manufacturer, that the simple acquisition of money is not quite enough. With this much, at least, moderately clear before them, they will contemplate new goals. They may even attempt to learn how to live. At any rate, I have the feeling that this is the notion rumbling dimly in their heads.

· 6 ·

The road led to Cleveland.

I am beginning to have the idea that the thing we consider as American culture will turn out, in the end, to be a culture of the cities. Civilizations — that is to say, patterns of conduct, of mores and morals and the attitude toward existence — have sprung from a relatively small variety of human tendencies: from the feeling for a particular stretch of earth, from a dream of stimulating government, from influences stretching far into a coherent past which center finally in the domination of a few souls

in whom those influences come to flower. In America, a feeling for the nation's soil, with its immense reaches of mountain and plain, its violent economic divisions, is a difficult thing to possess. Our national government is too diffuse and too much disputed for men to focus upon very clearly. We have only the rudiments of a past, and that is derived from other pasts.

But cities are ponderable entities. It is possible to feel very strongly about them, as witness the humble and altogether irritating surge of the booster movement. That movement, we may concede, had its roots in *ennui*, in vapid sentimentality, and in blind greed — but there is a fair chance that the booster spirit is susceptible of apotheosis, that it can be matured into a more worthy thing, less full of noise and charged with a genuine devotion. Indeed, I am persuaded to believe that such a maturity has already begun in Cleveland.

To begin with, it is a veritable city, a communal unit, rather than a chance grouping of houses and factories and the chance agglomeration of a million humans. It is unfortunate that I cannot articulate my impression more clearly. I simply knew within the first twenty-four hours that I was in a city that had distinct characteristics to make it different from any other city, that it was a contained and purposeful gathering together of people.

When I searched for facts to account for these characteristics, I was led a little into the town's history:

With the beginning of the westward movement, a small handful of New Englanders came to Cleveland with money in their pockets. This was a difference at the outset, for very few of the new Western towns had actual money to deal with at their founding. So Cleveland began its life,

a raw outpost of the frontier, with the inestimable advantage of established wealth. That wealth has been augmented tremendously, of course. But it has remained, for the most part, within the control of the little handful of New England families, and these families have retained throughout three generations a remarkable sense of responsibility. To be sure, they have been iron-willed squires of the city, peevish of any interference with their right to rule. But they have ruled it benevolently. They have molded it, with a fine allegiance to their Puritan conscience, according to their ancient conception of duty toward God and fellow man.

Perhaps this seems a trifle romantic, but the fact remains that it is quite true. With some obligation upon them to justify their possession of riches, the squires have said to their fellow citizens: "We shall spend a great deal of money to make your lives something besides a scramble for bread — but see to it that you don't lag with the scrambling."

The results have been explicit: The soundest and wisest municipal government in the country, to begin with — intelligent officials with the touch of humanity very strong upon them. Tom Johnson and Newton D. Baker have been among the mayors.

The hierarchy of millionaires has nurtured a genuine communal life. In countless enterprises, from the building of hospitals to the season of opera and the symphony orchestra, virtually all the levels of society have polled their desires and their enthusiasm. The people have built splendid libraries, which they really use. They have built a superb open-air stadium for their opera, and they go to the opera in large numbers. The education of the children

is of the first order, and the first sign of especial talent is met with sympathy, with extraordinary nourishment and stimulation. The education of adults is a new undertaking, but in a night school that was opened five years ago there are now nearly nine thousand students. They are not engaged upon vocational learning. They are not at work on books in the hope that they may, thereby, increase their earnings a little. They are studying languages and science and the ennobling arts. They are making a straightforward effort to deepen and broaden the stream of their existence. They are concerned with learning for its own sake — and that is the beginning of wisdom.

Enormous energies are at work to make the city a more beautiful thing physically. When the Mall Group is finished, with its stately buildings and its sweep of green earth, it will be among the most impressive scenes in all the country. Further than that, it will be a calm and lovely spectacle for the people to walk past every day, for the people to take all subconsciously into their lives.

Cleveland has grown past its rawness and its brawling excitements. It has acquired the first glaze of civilization's polish: an almost indefinable atmosphere of dignity and permanence, the elements of a reason for being.

I went to the house of a lawyer. He was a youngish man, but he has made a considerable amount of money. Eight or ten people were there to dine. I had no sooner found a chair in the living room than an idea which I had been nursing for a long time became a clear conviction: to wit, that the American upper-class home is a more seemly and satisfying place, in its decorations and its furnishings, in the sense of easeful grace which touches it everywhere, than any other homes that I have seen. English

drawing-rooms are so likely to be crowded with ponderous heirlooms out of a Dickensian past, the air in them is so likely to be musty, and there is such a grave chance that a portrait by Sir Joshua Reynolds will be staring down from a gloomy wall. French drawing-rooms, for the most part, are filled with fragile and insufficient chairs, the wall paper is so frequently an unsettling alternation of black and silver stripings, and the bric-a-brac has seen its day. German drawing-rooms are of two kinds: heavy window hangings, and monstrous tables burdened with military photographs, and incongruous items of French period design — or Berlin modernistic, which is an inept and uncomfortable imitation of French modernistic.

I remember so many American drawing-rooms that were warming to the eye and the spirit — that were meant, above all things, to be lived in. As well as any, I remember that of the Cleveland lawyer and his wife, a competent and merry woman, full of a secret irony toward pretense and display. I do not remember the room in detail. I cannot tell what the colors were, except that they were chaste and easeful. A fire was burning under a simple white mantel, upon which stood a single decoration fashioned out of thin glass — and the glass reflected the light of many lamps that stood on tables or on the floor. There were enough chairs and sofas, and I remember that they were comfortable, covered with pleasant fabrics. On the pale walls there were a few pictures — a painting or two in the modern style making brilliant and luminous spots — two exquisite Simones.

That is all. It was simply an amiable and soothing place to be. We sat in the room and had civilized cocktails and talked along. Everybody there had traveled a good deal,

and had really read the books he talked about. I have had such doleful contact with the culture craze which sweeps our country betimes that I am a little squeamish over any talk of art or music or literature. The words themselves, unless I chance to be with practitioners of those high crafts, have the power to make me uneasy. My ear is tuned for fraudulent enthusiasms, for the glibness of tongues which desire above everything to be impressive. Yet I felt sure that art and music and literature impinged very definitely upon the lives of the dozen people there. They did not talk very much about such things, but chance allusions springing from an under-knowledge and an under-feeling gave the key.

We had a civilized dinner and all of us went to the Play House, an amateur producing enterprise. The theater building was handsome and professional in its appearance, and while we were waiting for the curtain I learned that the group was organized fifteen years ago — that it plays to an annual audience of more than one hundred thousand, and that it supports itself very well. Unhappily, it does not find very much that is worth producing among the manuscripts of its own members, but it is not discouraged in the search and continues to experiment.

I read the list of plays for the current season: "Electra", "Julius Cæsar", "Resurrection", "The Lower Depths", "The Inspector General" — and Chlumberg's "Miracle of Verdun", Philip Barry's "Hotel Universe", Alan Rinehart's "Volcano", Pirandello's "Pleasure of Honesty", Marcel Pagnol's "Topaz", Aldous Huxley's "World of Light", Girandoux's "Amphytrion 38", Molnar's "Riviera", Charles McElvoy's "God Loves Us", and Witter Bynner's "Cake."

That seemed to me altogether respectable fare for any theater to provide, and even if we weep at the small proportion of native drama, we cannot grow despondent over the sort of amusement that is being offered to the people of Cleveland. In the production I saw, the players were bright and vigorous and full of enthusiasm. I did not find myself grieving because they did not possess the slick cunning of Broadway.

After the theater we called on one of the friends of my host. He lived in a modest little bungalow in a modest little street. The contrast was very strong between his small, crowded room, all cluttered with books, and the expansive room that I had visited earlier in the evening, for he was poor. But it was quite evident that the lawyer and his wife were unaware of any such contrast. We sat and drank gin and ginger ale and talked about the future of America. We did not get very far with that, of course, for when the future of America is under consideration nobody seems in a mood to listen. Everybody wants to talk. Still, we had a good time. We remained there until it was very late.

I came away from Cleveland with the feeling that its people have a very clear idea as to what they are doing with their lives. All that I met were living without pretension, employing with a cool restraint whatever luxuries they could afford. I found an energy for life that yet was not touched with frenzy. I found people who were direct, and honest, and urbane.

I do not doubt that among the million people of Cleveland there are bores and empty-pates in normal proportion to the bores and empty-pates of the human race. But since I find no great delight — not even a masochistic one

— in talking to such fellows, whether they be in Cleveland or New York or London or Vienna or Florence, I did not strain myself to hunt for them. On the other hand, it is certain that they did not force themselves upon my consciousness. Let us presume that they are there: learning their sales talks and paying their lodge dues — writing their letters to the press in behalf of hundred per cent Americanism — composing editorials for the newspapers and preserving their blindness toward the humanities — making awkward love to girls too pretty for them and digging up payments on the new car. And let us leave them to the stern sympathies of Mr. Lewis and Mr. Mencken, with the hope that Jehovah will dispense some faint mercy to their unhappy souls.

· 7 ·

Detroit lives by activity, by the incessant pulse of some irresistible dynamic. It seems less a city, a fixed and ordered spot upon the face of the earth, than a gathering together of immense forces. The chief aim of these forces, of course, is the making of automobiles. You have the feeling that it was some mere excess of wild energy which flung those handsome towers against the sky — and that at any moment, with a Gargantuan rumbling, the towers themselves might begin to roll like the car of Juggernaut. I could discover no coherence among the million and a half of human souls, except the singularity of their aim to make as many automobiles as possible. I could find no theme upon which to string my own small adventures. It is a city whipped by excitements — the excitements of

industry and politics and crime, of hunger and of wealth. And out of those excitements only numbers seem to have any significance:

Population 1900, 285,704. Population 1930, 1,500,000.

Three billion dollars worth of goods produced annually.

Total of motor vehicle and accessory manufactories, 178.

Henry Ford, richest man in the nation, resources one billion dollars. . . .

Until the numbers themselves lose all meaning.

My experiences were all detached, utterly unrelated.

I asked the doorman at the hotel, a few minutes after my arrival, where I might find a glass of beer. He gave me a little printed card and I went to an address, knocking on the basement door of a ramshackle frame house three blocks away from the handsomest tower in America. They let me in, and I found a gaudily decorated bar: artificial windows streaming with artificial sunlight and shaded by artificial Spanish awnings — crimson ceiling and yellow walls — a waiter fumbling at the knobs of a big radio, tuning out a jazz band and finding the New York Philharmonic orchestra.

There was one other client in the establishment and he invited me to have a drink with him. "It's on me," he said. "This is my day." He pulled a thousand dollars from his pocket — or very nearly a thousand dollars, in fifty-dollar bills. "See that?" he asked. "Well, I won it. Won the main prize with my kid. Get that?

"Listen, mister. My kid, William Henshew Prentice, Junior, is the most perfect baby in this man's town. Judges said so, didn't they? Gave him the blue, didn't they? And

gave me a thousand bucks. One thousand smackers. First prize. Have a drink."

I said, "But the money belongs to the baby, doesn't it?"

"Sure," he said. "Surest thing you know. And you never would figure what I'm going to do with it. Nobody could figure, because I haven't told anybody. Not even the wife. Well, sir, I'm going to make a doctor out of him. That's it. A doctor of medicine. William Henshew Prentice, Jr., M.D. And when I get the gripes, he'll give me the right pills to take, hunh? Say — that's pretty good, ain't it? Haw!"

He pulled out his wallet, which contained the photograph of a plump baby. "That's him," he said. "That's the little devil."

The bartender leaned over and took the money out of his hand. The bartender looked like a thug until you saw that he really had a sentimental pair of eyes. "Listen, Jack," he said, "I'm taking the cash, see? Right here in the cash drawer, see? And this guy can be a witness. You ain't going to blow all of that kid's money on this punk booze."

He looked at me and winked, while the father of the prize-winner howled. Then he said, "Pipe down, Jack. Pipe down. Here. Have a drink. It's on the house."

I left after a while. They were still arguing bitterly.

The next day I went to the Detroit Athletic Club for luncheon. It is an enormous club building and seems much more like a hotel, but its members are thoroughly hospitable. We went up to the rooms occupied by one of them — seven or eight Detroit men and myself. A boy brought in cocktails, and all of my hosts began to talk about New York. They knew as much about New York as I did, and

probably more. All of their social interests and their mild intellectual interests seemed to center there. I discovered that each of them went to New York about once a month, stayed there as long as possible, and returned to Detroit to hurry through some item of necessary labor. All the parties and the happenings they talked about were New York parties and happenings. They had the latest wheezes out of the Fifty-second Street speak-easies at their finger tips.

I asked, "Doesn't anything go on here — in Detroit?"

"Everybody commutes to New York," they answered. "Oh, we have some country clubs. They are all right when you can't get away from town."

I was invited to a dance at one of the country clubs. It was a very large country club, set in the midst of a beautiful golf course. A great deal of money had been spent to make it handsome, and it was indeed handsome after the fashion of country clubs. The party in progress was crowded and gay. The music was excellent. The women were incredibly lovely, and most of them wore gowns from Paris. Everybody was drinking constantly — or nearly everybody — and the loud sound of laughter was continuous.

There were eight or ten people in the group at our table, and they undertook to point out the important people to me. As I listened to them, and nodded, and made out the indicated figures moving in the press, I became conscious of their social hierarchy. It was a hierarchy of motors. Deference was paid, in this gathering, to vice presidents and general managers, to production chiefs and sales department heads — and they, in turn, were important in proportion to the annual gross receipts of the companies they represented. The vice president of Chrysler, for ex-

ample, clearly outranked the president of Hudson; and the entry of one of the Fisher brothers would, I verily believe, have brought the whole crowd to its feet, voices shouting and glasses uplifted. No doubt that is an exaggeration. But such was the effect borne in upon me.

Among all the merry sounds, I talked to an eighteen-year-old girl. She was enchanting to look at, slim and vivid and charged with taut energy. I told her it seemed absurd to ask her a lot of dull questions. "But go ahead," she said. "I'm not drinking, anyway. It's pretty hard to keep the old charm turned on at these parties unless you're drinking."

I said, "You're not the picture of somebody having a big time."

She said, "Well, I was home from school for a few days, and Mike — that's the boy friend — had to go to Chicago and look for a job. I just came on out here with the family. They wanted me to."

I said, "How do these people strike you? I mean the friends of Papa and Mama?"

"They're stupid," she said. "They know it. Everybody knows it."

"How?" I asked.

"Acting wild, like this," she said. Her small dark head nodded toward the flushed faces of the men, leaning over their tables, and the bright gleaming eyes of the women. "They'll be saying to-morrow — at least I know my Dad will — 'Tell me, how much of a monkey did I make of myself last night?' And I'll tell him. And he'll go into the sulks."

I said, "Tell me, will you, about — "

She interrupted me with a grimace. "For God's sweet

sake," she said, "don't ask me about the younger generation. I couldn't stand up under it."

"Why?" I asked.

"I'm just tired of that word. I'm tired of all these people talking about the younger generation and writing about the younger generation. Wouldn't you think I was an idiot if I said — let's see — well, 'Now, ladies and gents, take our older generation. The older generation goes out to the Country Club every Saturday night and gets cockeyed, setting a dismal example for us, giving us a heritage of headaches and the jitters and Bromo Seltzer. The older generation is washed up, and knows it's washed up, and they're hanging on by their teeth, trying to kid themselves into thinking they are still important. . . .' "

Both of us were laughing, and she said, "Here. I'll take just one little sip of wine, so you won't think I'm an old fogy."

Then she went on. "Don't you see how silly it is when people talk like that? All a lot of glittering generalities that don't mean a thing. There isn't any younger generation. There are such and such a number of people who are somewhere between adolescence and getting married. There is just as much difference between them as there is between people like these — " She nodded again toward the dance floor. "You don't put Ruth Judd and Albert Einstein and Henry Ford and Ruth Hanna McCormick in a hat and call them the older generation, do you? Well, why in the name of common sense put me and Minnie Smith from the Chevrolet works and Francis Two-Gun Crowley and Albie Booth in a hat and call us the younger generation? It just doesn't make any sense."

I said, "That's all very well, but I should think there

are some general tendencies in your generation that don't show up in mine at all."

She said, "That's just so much hooey." She fell silent. I guess she was bored. I couldn't think of any more questions that would not sound foolish in the face of such enthusiastic convictions.

So I said, "Go on. Talk some more."

She said, "People like me — girls, I mean — are pretty much up against it. Father and mother acting like a ten-year-old most of the time, and pretending to like it, and really not liking it very much. They can't think of anything else. Well, we are trying to figure out some decent, sensible way to live. Something better than that. Have a good time, of course, but live with some intelligence too."

I said, "You mean that you like to think seriously about life."

"Certainly," she said.

"Well," I said, "that's all right. It is the prerogative of youth: the downcast eye and heart of gloom. Natural result of the shock sustained upon the discovery that the world is a silly place to live in. But after a while the comic sense will come along. That will help."

"These superior people!" she said.

Her father came off the dance floor and leaned between us, stumbling a little. "Give this bird," he said to her, "a good earful about Detroit. He's going to write us up, see? Make it be good. The old town's depending on you." He laughed heavily and banged us both on the back.

I would not enjoy such a look from my daughter as she gave to him. There was a dark touch of malice in it. And she said under her breath, "Babbitt!"

I said, "He's an extremely nice fellow, and you know it."

She did not answer. She was suddenly very unhappy, with that unhappiness of childhood which comes like an abrupt appearance of dark cloud to obscure a field of sunshine.

I said, "You have all the reason in the world for taking life more seriously than anybody else. In the first place, you have love to contend with — and that is certainly the most dismal emotion I know of. The decisions you have to make are more vital than any decisions the solid citizens ever have to make: whom you are going to marry and what sort of life you want to live — how much sincerity and how much guile you should count upon in this world. And you have to go through the terrible ordeal of being convinced that it is impossible to live a glamorous, romantic existence, that all your contriving will not let you escape the humdrum and the workaday. . . ."

She said, "You talk like the Reverend Doctor Gumshoe, of the First Baptist Church."

I said, "All right then. Have it your own way. Go on and be serious."

She said, and there was a little relenting in her quick smile, "I'll tell you this, if you're still looking for notes on that younger generation. It's a myth, but you like to believe in it. I'll tell you this: I know about a hundred girls, in school and out, and they're all chaste. All but one or two, anyway. One or two are a little foolish. I know about twenty-five or thirty boys, in school and out, and most of 'em have plenty of sense. They're all worried to death right now, except a few rich ones, about what they're going to do in the way of a career. It's not much fun to be around

them, because they want you to hear all about it — all about their big ideas and the hard time they have doing anything on account of the depression. But they're decent. They've got more morals than you have. They didn't learn their morals from their parents — " she glanced out at the swimming faces upon the dance floor, "nor from preachers nor college professors. They're just decent people with some conscience. Now — is all that a light in the darkness?"

I assured her that it was a most alluring light. "How about Mike?" I asked. "The boy friend?"

"Mike's all right," she said. "He hasn't got a nickel, poor dear, and what he's going to do with that lovely education from the Harvard Business School is more than either of us knows. He's trying so hard to get a job — a job with some future to it. I told him he couldn't go in the automobile business. I couldn't make the grade on that. But any other kind of business — and he's seeing some plow people in Chicago now. God knows what either of us understands about plows, but he can learn. And we're going to get married next year when I quit school, or bust trying.

"I'm not going to live on Dad. I know a lot of girls that do that. Just get married and walk home from the church and say 'Well, here we are, and I need a new pair of shoes, please.' But I couldn't stand that. I'll take money. Sure. But I'll have my own little love-nest and run my own life."

I told her that she had tough fibers in her spirit and that I liked her tremendously. I told her that if there was very much thinking like hers in the younger generation, it is a better crowd than the older generation. She said that all of the younger generation she knew hated the older genera-

tion pretty thoroughly and did not care in the least about being understood by such a stupid lot.

When I woke up the next day, I went to the Ford plant and saw the cars dropping from the production line — one every two or three minutes. I saw men that were all but indistinguishable from the machines they were operating, and when I tried to talk to them — even going to their homes with a man who knew them — I made no progress at all. All of them seemed to live in tight small houses, listening to the radio, dulled to all mental processes by the clamor of their work and the clamor of the jazz music they were hearing. They were more nearly robots — those I saw, at any rate — than I believed it possible for human beings to become. My effort to understand something about them was a complete failure. I could feel only the presence of thousands of souls with dazed brains, into which there penetrated only the banalities of movie thrillers, Amos 'n' Andy, the Detroit Tigers, and the current murder mystery. I have no doubt that this is a gross injustice to them. I scourge myself for it. But I could do no more. I was a little dazed myself after a day in that factory.

In the swirl of energy that poured all about me and suffused Detroit until the city seemed to vibrate, I made detached notes:

They elected a mayor who said that nobody would go hungry if he won. And he gave away two million dollars cash every month to people who asked for it. The bums poured in. The free lodging houses were crowded (cars owned by the paupers standing parked in the street before the lodging houses all night, and the paupers complaining

indignantly at the quality of their food). A call for three hundred workmen at the municipal docks, and policemen standing by to keep the eager mobs in check, and, alas only twenty-five men putting in an appearance. A city park given over to radical agitators for their speech-making, and a bum on the outskirts of the crowd, listening to a Communist harangue and saying loudly to his companion, "If you listen to that bird we'll all have to go to work."

I left Detroit with the feeling that I knew very little about it. One cannot know so intangible a thing as a detached and invisible force that tosses up a magnificent city against the sky in two decades — changing it from a slumberous town that made a few stoves and watched the ships go down the lake, into a Colossus on wheels, an apotheosis of horse power.

I looked back toward the city from a distance. It was a fair prospect, red and green and blue lights playing upon the towers, and the little stars far above looking pale and trivial. From that distance, Detroit seemed like a temple of many turrets, and I fell upon the notion that it was the shrine of industry, the sanctum of mass production — fell to brooding, a little disconsolately, that I had fumbled in my oblations.

II

The Urgent City

FROM the level prairie the way led into a maze of suburban industry: crooked, ill-paved streets lined with bleak houses and thick with the murk of factory vapors — fuming tall stacks and blackened crucibles, the ring of hammers upon metal and bawling of ragged children who swarmed like flies. But presently it broke from this ugly welter and gave into a broad parkway. Off to the right now, in a sudden and faintly astonishing burst of loveliness, the waters of the lake were very blue in the late sunshine. On every side the earth wore a dress of emerald grass, fringed with stiff evergreens. The wind sang, and it was a little chill, but it had a tonic quality. There was a long drive down a curving road. The ugly factory suburb was quite forgotten. And the trees and water, the distant gleam of the dying sun, the wind and the emptiness of the earth made cities seem very far away. Then, without the least warning, a long reach opened ahead and the towers of Chicago were lifting against the sky like towers in a dream.

The approach was like that — dramatic. And the sense

of some planned drama increased by even stages until I was in the heart of the city. I stopped the automobile at the end of Michigan Avenue — where the bridge crosses the Chicago River — and got out and looked around. Darkness had fallen and a million electric bulbs were glowing from the buildings. The streets were a confusion of jammed motor traffic and people who ran headlong in all directions. Each of the million lights struck down to make a trembling reflection in the black river and the superb peaks of the towers were piled in close, hard outline against the sky.

The thing was explosive in its effect upon the eye. It was more the fabulous projection of a city than a city itself. New York and London, Paris and Berlin and Vienna suddenly became old-fashioned and dull in the memory. This was like a monstrous theatrical spectacle, when the curtain first goes up and you are a little dazed and you say "But heavens! It's more stunning than the real thing!" I felt as if the fireworks might commence at any instant, with rockets soaring and terrible detonations shaking the air, and that a flaming screen a mile high might begin to spell in red and white and blue: Chicago — World's Greatest City.

But that failed, alas, to happen. The people were straining to get home. The police were blowing their whistles. One of them came up to me and asked whether I knew that I was blocking traffic. I apologized and spent an hour fighting my way through the crush to the biggest hotel on earth.

I was to learn, during the next few days, that this physical aspect of Chicago — the sheer combination of buildings and streets and parks and bridges — is in very

many respects the rationale of Chicago. For ten or fifteen years it has almost completely absorbed the communal energy — for the communal energy has been engaged upon a complete rearrangement of the sticks and stones, the steel and the concrete and the earth itself. Upon, indeed, the manufacture of a new city out of an old one. Surely, such an undertaking is one of the most extraordinary in the world. And even if the problems of government and crime, of education and the nurturing of the humanities, have lain in abeyance while the city-builders labored at their task, the result is still a thing to stir a good deal of awe.

Just after the World's Fair, civic pride soared to the apogee in Chicago. It stung with its hot virus a few particular rich men, and these men got together, and they decided as lightly as you or I would decide to buy a new hat that they must have the finest city on the globe, no less. They formed a City Plan Commission and gave it money and put it to work. And though this commission has never had any authority except that of a general public enthusiasm, its edicts have been obeyed as explicitly as were Napoleon's when he commanded Baron Haussmann to rebuild Paris. Through shifting administrations and the worst city government on earth, the people have paid taxes to make over their town and the work has steadily progressed.

"How?" I asked. "How — in the face of Big Bill Thompson, and unremitting robberies from the city treasury, and incompetence even worse than the robbery?" The answer was a wink. "Remember," I was told, "there is always graft when it comes to letting big contracts. There were some sweet contracts in this plan."

The Plan Commission began by saying that a billion dollars' worth of real estate along the lake front should have no buildings upon it — and now the lake front is a continuous and magnificent park. That meant tearing down a few houses, and putting land where there had been no land, and covering a sunken railroad track with green lawn, but most of it has been done and the rest is being done. With an utterly ruthless cutting down of homes and factories, a ruthless wiping out of streets and alleys, they have built two wide boulevards that belt the town. Within their ambit there are parks and lagoons with artificial bathing beaches and basins for the anchoring of small boats. Every mile or so there is a golf course — more than a hundred within the city.

Buildings have been destroyed upon the decision of the Plan Commission that they were ugly. That reason, incredibly enough, was deemed sufficient. Other buildings have been put up merely because they fill a vacant space handsomely, and all agreed likewise, that this was reason enough.

The work goes on every day, and even the most competent guide is likely to be a little baffled as he leads you through the new city emerging from the old.

"Why, now," said my own guide, "I certainly didn't know they had this job done. Last time I was through this street it was just an alley." We were driving along a broad thoroughfare, full of traffic and full of policemen blowing whistles under bronze traffic towers. The change had been accomplished by the simple expedient of cutting twenty feet from the front of every house on both sides of the streets. Shorn of their faces, the houses stared down at us: tiers of strange, naked rooms suddenly opened to

the sun and the wind and the peering eyes of the town.

My guide took me to Wacker Drive. It seems that a Mr. Wacker felt there should be a more efficient connection between Jackson Boulevard and Michigan Avenue. So with all of his energy and most of his money he directed, single-handed, the tearing down of the whole commission merchant district along the river, moved the willing merchants somewhere else, and built a new street with three traffic levels to suit his notion of a proper town. It was to be expected, no doubt, that he would embellish this avenue with his own name. Wacker Drive runs directly over the spot where a few worried troopers once built a blockhouse in the wilderness and called it Fort Dearborn.

But the rush of building, of converting a haphazard old city into a stunning new one, is not the private hobby of a few people. The waitress in the restaurant will ask whether you have taken a drive around the outer boulevard. "Finest sight in the world," she will say with forthright conviction. More than a dozen people, observing the New York license plates on my car, came abruptly up to me and wanted to know whether Chicago was not far more splendid than Manhattan. I had the odd feeling that it would be dangerous to argue about it. There was an urgency in their pride, a deep personal belief in the magnificence of their town. It was one of the things they lived by, for merely to be of Chicago comforted them and stimulated them.

Together with this new and sometimes exciting beauty — a beauty to which all the people feel they are contributing, as indeed they are in the tax assessments — another thing has gripped profoundly the imagination of

Chicago. That is size, the elemental quality of bulk and stature. Such a preoccupation is supposed to be a characteristic of all Americans. But I am dubious of that generality, as I am growing to be dubious of all glib generalities about Americans. On the other hand, it is surely true of Chicago and the Chicagoans. Everybody talks about size, the size of buildings, of population, of manufactures, of thefts and swindles, of church attendance and graft figures. I met many people whose whole feeling was for the immensities, and of these I remember best an executive working for a company that manufactures harvester machinery. He and his wife took me in their car through the downtown traffic maze.

He pointed out buildings to me. "Look," he said, "there's the Merchandise Mart. It's the largest man-made structure in the world. In that other tower yonder are the offices of the largest soap company in the world, and on top of it you see the biggest and brightest aviation beacon ever built. Oh, Chicago is a great place, all right. In two more generations we'll have fifty million people. It's bound to come. Our transportation and our natural location in the key spot of the country will do it.

"Nobody realizes what Chicago really is." His eyes were very bright with his eagerness, and the eyes of his wife were no less bright and proud. "Remember this," he said. "Chicago is already the greatest wholesale lumber market in the world. It's the greatest market in the world for leather and hides. Chicago distributes more automobiles than any other city and raises more flowers than any other spot on the globe. . . ."

He went on and on. His wife helped him to remember. I interrupted him with a confession that his facts were

impressive, and then I asked, "Why does this seem so important to you? Why do you care, either of you, whether Chicago is a big city or a little city? Where does the kick come from? It isn't of any importance to your business — you don't sell plows and reapers in Chicago."

He looked at me as if I had asked, "Why do you breathe?" and his wife made a sound of utter astonishment.

"Why, man!" he exclaimed. "That's progress. You are interested in progress, aren't you? We're going to have the most important city in the world, and that's worth having, isn't it? We'll do it if energy and ambition count for anything."

I am quite convinced that two million people living in that city feel almost precisely the same way about it. Their town is genuinely a part of their religion, their fundamental belief. I talked to two or three hundred people — from thugs to matrons of the Gold Coast. And all of them managed to express, in one way or another, a profound excitement over living in Chicago and an even profounder ambition for seeing it the giant of all cities — the ultimate city, making all others tame and puny. It was an intimate and satisfying experience for them, simply to be citizens of such a place.

I suppose it was a little ridiculous of me to call on Mr. Paul Romano. Yet somehow, when in Chicago, it seems proper to make the acquaintance of at least one gangster, and an obliging newspaper reporter said that it would be simple. The reporter had engaged to show me a little of the city's night life (he was once an All-American halfback who now makes sixty-five dollars a week covering police) and we began with a glass of beer. That, however,

was not so simple. Despite the bootleg kings, beer isn't just around the corner in Chicago.

"We'll have to drive out a way," the reporter said. "There isn't a place in the Loop we could get into. Oh, there are probably ten or twelve speak-easies downtown, but they're well hidden. Most of them are swell joints, hooked up with gambling, and nobody but the rich boys and the professional crooks ever goes there."

We drove for about a mile and came up before a grubby-looking house with heavy curtains at the windows. They let us in, after the reporter had gone to considerable lengths to prove his identity, and in a gloomy room, with somebody plunking at a piano, we sat for half an hour over our beer, listening to the proprietor bemoan the raw deal that had been given Al Capone.

"I don't defend the big fellow," he said. "I'm in the business, but I' got some respect for law and order. I'm against all that damn' fool killing they do. But what is Capone? He's a business man, selling a million people something they want. That's what he is. And this judge that sent him up — breaking an agreement for a deal that was made and putting the big boy away for a long time — who is he? He's just a politician, ain't he? That's all any judge is — somebody that's got to stand in right with the party to get his appointment.

"And I never heard of a politician that was what you'd call strictly honest. If some big shot in his party came up before him, he'd ease up, wouldn't he? Sure he would. But they were down on the big boy — a fellow just doing a business that's supported by half the citizens — and they put him away. I never saw Capone in my life. Never had any dealing with him, personal, I mean. But if you call

that justice, then we've got a pretty tough proposition to go up against."

When we left, I said to the reporter (who brought an A.B. degree away from his college in addition to his fame as a ball carrier), "What do you think of that? What do you think of his slant?"

"Al was slipping, anyway," the reporter said. "He had to be slipping, or they never would have put the bug on him like that. He was losing his hold, losing his power. You don't last forever in that kind of game."

We drove from the beer flat to Police Headquarters, where all the boys knew the reporter and gave him a welcome. We saw the radio room, where messages were being sent out — one every minute on the average — to cruising cars equipped with receiving sets: equipped also with machine guns and automatic rifles, tear bombs and sawed-off shotguns. The announcer's voice went in a steady monotone:

"Report from Division Four. Three men in Buick coupe held up and robbed filling station at 2117 Hillis Avenue. All young. Shot proprietor. Escaped in direction Jackson Boulevard. Two wore light felt hats and one wore cap. No further description."

We saw prisoners coming in, a steady stream of them, black and white and yellow and brown, and we chatted with a Lieutenant of Detectives. He was a fatherly man. You felt that he had come from some small, snug flat — from a dinner of corned beef and cabbage, and from admonishments to his offspring about hard study and better table manners.

"It's the gals," he said despondently. "More crooks are made by greedy gals than all the rest of it put together.

The gals go to the movies and see some handsome egg get away with murder and buy his dame a fur coat. And they say, 'I want me a smart guy like that. I want some excitement and a fur coat.' Well, the boys are saps. They fall for it. And the girls know that if we finally grab the boys, the photographers will be around from the papers to get pictures; 'Beautiful Blonde Sweetheart of Tiger Murderer.' They eat that stuff up. They know that damn' few of *them* ever get sent away — the girls, I mean. They ain't taking any risks."

An automobile drove up and three weary detectives got out. They reported ill luck in the chase after a hold-up gang and went on into the back room to play a hand or two of rummy until the next call came.

"But," the Lieutenant went on, after nodding an acknowledgment of their report, "you ought not to spend your time in Chicago looking up crime. Everybody's sick of hearing about that. Why don't you fellows writing about Chicago tell something about all the parks we got, and the way the kids can go out and play in the woods? I had my kids out there last Sunday. . . ."

He launched out upon the marvels of Chicago, and we left him. In my brief meeting with him he seemed kind and domestic and stolid — the last creature on earth to be in perpetual conflict with the harshest criminal population that our world has known.

The reporter said we would go to see Paul Romano now. "Paul is sort of hiding out," he said. "One of his crowd killed a man down in Gary four or five days ago."

We rode endlessly through commonplace streets until we reached a commonplace apartment house. We walked up two flights of stairs and a dark girl in a blue dress

opened the door for us. Paul was glad to see his friend the reporter. He sat in a plush armchair in a small living room that was crowded with furniture, and he was playing a silver-plated saxophone.

"I've been trying to get that thing down," he said. "But it's a lot harder than it looks. Listen." He picked up the instrument and an expression of extraordinary concentration absorbed his face. He looked, then, very little like the huge colored photograph of himself that hung over the mantel. He was about twenty-five, thin and dark, and his hands were full of a nervous vitality. The saxophone grunted and whined, and he put it down in disgust. "Can you get somebody to teach you to play them things?" he asked.

We told him that there were many teachers.

"I'll get one to come up and give me lessons," he said. "Private lessons. I can pay for 'em." He got up and poured out three drinks in absurd Czecho-Slovakian goblets and we drank to each other's health.

He looked at me. "New York, eh?" He laughed to himself. "I was in New York once. That's a tame town. They don't come so tough in that town."

I said, "Tell me, Paul. How does it feel to kill a man?"

He looked up with a gleam in his eye and began a slow gesture. But then he stopped, with a sharp glance at the girl who sat quietly in the corner, and laughed. "No," he said. "No. I wouldn't know about that." He laughed again, and the reporter and I laughed heartily with him. It seemed terribly funny.

I said, "How are things going these days?"

"Oh, good enough," he said. "A short life and a merry

one." We all laughed again. He turned to the reporter. "Was you there last night when they burnt those four guys at the prison?"

"Oh, the barbecue, you mean?" the reporter asked. We laughed a long time. "No, I wasn't there. They didn't send me. They sent Cramer. He wrote a hot story, didn't he?"

Paul said, "Yes. But they were a bunch of punks. A smart guy never would get in a spot like that."

I said, "You know, people back East think you fellows run Chicago."

"Sure," he said. "Why not? Somebody's got to run a big town like this. Those boobs down at City Hall couldn't swing it. All they can do is what you tell 'em to do. But I ain't talking to you about my business, see? You wouldn't ask me to do that. You wouldn't ask a guy to talk about his private business to nobody."

He played with the saxophone for a few minutes while we sat silently with our drinks, and then he put it down and began to talk about night clubs. He said, "New York hasn't got any real swell dumps. Chicago joints have the class." He offered to show me places that were bigger and better than anything anywhere in the world, and then he got to talking about women he had known. Occasionally, when he became exceptionally tender at some memory, the girl in her big chair would move her hands a little in her lap and drop her gaze. She never spoke, and we became almost oblivious of her presence.

The telephone rang and Paul answered it. He exclaimed sharply into the mouthpiece and hung up the receiver. He reached for his hat and said he would have to be going. A curious change seemed to come over him and he hurried away down the steps without saying good-by

either to us or the girl. We heard his car start off very rapidly.

"He's scared," said the reporter. "Those birds put up a front, but they stay scared most of the time. And not many of 'em make much money. You saw what kind of a dump he was living in, and he's on his way to being a big shot."

The visitor to Chicago has an acute consciousness of men like Paul Romano moving beneath the surface of the city's life — and women like that still, hushed figure in blue, whose name we never learned. In the valley, which is a wide and shallow depression falling away from the very middle of the city, there are hordes of people and long streets of mean houses. The visitor is aware of swirling human conflicts going on in the valley, of harsh scrambling for a crumb of the city's wealth in the shadow of the biggest business buildings in the world. He catches a faint glimpse of those schemes in operation. And he is likely to be touched by a faint access of despair as he thinks of the Government at Washington — the grave gathering of minds to ponder the welfare of the nation, speaking learnedly of tariffs and foreign affairs and relief for agriculture — so blind to the valley and its implications, so remote from it and so helpless.

How absurd it seems to consider for President of the United States charming gentlemen who are hardly aware that crime costs more money every year than the total of the Federal Income Tax? How preposterous it seems to debate national policies with only an idle reference to those immediate realities, gangsters and racketeers. Who would know, listening to the campaign speeches, that crime is perhaps the third American industry, and that there is no

career open to a boy or a girl so full of glamour and excitement and money to spend?

On the other hand, the gangs and the rackets, the debauchery of youth and the millions of dollars lost to criminals do not impinge very heavily upon the thoughts of the honest citizens of Chicago. They always think it a little strange for visitors to confess an absorption with the oligarchy of dead-pan gang leaders under which they live. They say, "Well, we don't know any more about them than you do."

They are all working too furiously to think very much about crime. The whole of Chicago seems organized for toil, a breathless outpouring of energy with all goals obscured in the clamor of labor for its own sake. The noise of the hive is in the air. On the floor of the World's Largest Dance Hall, two thousand couples keep time to continuous music with a fierce concentration, and in the slaughter houses the pig-stickers are a study in absorption with their bloody task. Even the quarter million Negroes huddled in their squalid settlement have shaken off their Southern carelessness. You hear little laughter from them and they have caught the hurrying stride. To where? They could not answer.

Amid such preoccupation with immediate tasks there is little wonder that nobody cares much about government, that nobody cares much who steals and who kills, as long as the stealing and the killing do not strike too close to home. There is little wonder, likewise, that the drones of the hive are ignored and left to work out their own clouded destiny.

Even in such a place as the Institute of Fine Arts there is the same hypnotic concentration upon the job at hand.

It is, to be truthful, a most excellent institution, governed by men with a sure æsthetic sense and a devotion to fine painting. As might be expected, it boasts more students than any place of its sort in the world. From the remote farms of the Mississippi Valley, from the factories and the tenements and the stockyards, the youth that is touched with a gleam of talent comes to learn.

I met a young instructor. He is studying himself, but earns his living by teaching the newcomers. He was born in a tiny house, far down the river, and his mother toiled savagely to send him to Chicago, surrendering all hope of luxury or comfort for herself. He led me into one of his classes where a hundred young men and women were working from a nude. Every one of the hundred was going fiercely at his work, handling brush and pencil with an urgent haste, as if life itself depended on what happened within the next ten minutes.

The young instructor said to me: "About half of them are here because it's the fashionable thing to do. But they work just as hard as the rest. They seem to get really interested. Of the others, most are studying to be commercial artists. But quite a few are going in for fine art. They have tremendous ambition. It's almost certain that two or three will be good artists.

"But," he said, "the most interesting thing to me is the changing attitude of the people toward talent in the family. A few years ago the boy in this part of the world who liked to paint or draw was a sissy. There was something wrong with him, and he had to make his little pictures on the sly. The idea of spending money to develop his gift was ridiculous. But nowadays we have the most unexpected people in the world bringing their youngsters

to us and telling us to make artists out of them — and in a hurry. They're always in a hurry."

I watched the pencils and the brushes flying, and I could believe that.

"But please," he said — and he looked a little wistful, a little shy — "please say that we have some genuine interest in art in Illinois. Please write a little about the people who are trying like the devil to be good artists. We have about seventeen thousand members of the Illinois Art Association. Even if one per cent of them really mean it — you see what I'm after saying. . . ."

I remembered the hotel art exhibits I had seen. Hardly a hotel in the country but has its display of local talent in a little makeshift gallery somewhere — and the pictures full of a terrible earnestness — sometimes full of an astonishing and plangent beauty.

"I understand what you mean," I told him. "The writing people have been pretty savage with you artists, haven't they?"

He said, "Jesus, yes. Even if we are terrible incompetents and boobs, God knows we're trying to be something else. And furthermore — " suddenly a hard and angry light was in his face — "furthermore who are all the slick little sprigs of wisdom who sit back and shoot their popguns at American artists? Do they really know anything about pictures? Do they ever really go to look at pictures? When they say — 'Of course, Picasso now — ' Have they really ever looked at Picasso? I've got the notion that they do most of their talking about pictures out of books — not out of picture galleries. Who are they? Do they really know anything? Have they got any background? Or is it just an easy, neat imitation of people like Mencken?"

I could not answer him very well. Because I have the notion pretty strongly in my head that the most dismal thing in all the culture of America is a thing that might be called reverse Philistinism — a horde of facile little people adopting an attitude about America that they have learned from magazine articles, writing with a broad and graceful mockery on matters concerning which they know quite nothing.

So I said, "You paint your pictures and don't pay any attention to what you read."

The urgency of which I have spoken, the acute devotion to the job in hand, is instantly notable in the colleges also. The University of Chicago is quite an impressive place. Its standards of scholarship are high and it is one of the few institutions in the country which maintains an almost complete indifference to the absurd glamor of athletic prestige. But still there is no faint suggestion of quiet in its precincts, of studious retirement in contemplation of the world's learning.

A professor told me: "The men who study here have no interest at all in real education: in the discovery of those intellectual amenities that inform the spirit and enlarge the mind. They have no concern with understanding the variety and resource of human thought.

"There goes a boy who is studying economics. Very well, he simply wants to know all the economics there is to know in the shortest possible time. He is in a rush to learn the things that are written in the books, and to leave here, and to apply that learning to the next specific job he has to tackle. Heaven help him — heaven help them all, on the day they sit back and wonder what they have been working for."

Identically such a one I did encounter a few evenings later — a man who had come out of some little college and worked with uninquiring fury for the best part of a lifetime. He had just begun to wonder why. We sat, at first, in the parlor of the small suburban house that he rented. Then his daughter received a caller — a tall young fellow — and we moved upstairs to leave them alone.

I already knew something about this man: Forty-eight or thereabouts. Mechanical draughtsman in the employ of one firm for the past twenty years. A pleasant wife, devoted and marvelously thrifty. A son working his way through some technical school. This daughter downstairs, in love. He was poor and honest and industrious. . . .

And he was terribly anxious to talk, because he was worried. He was not worried about his job, because he knew he was competent at it and would have it forever if he wanted it. He was worried about the disposal of the rest of his life.

"I was mighty ambitious when I came out of school and got married," he said. "I had it all planned to be president of the company some day. But now I know I never will be. I've worked for years with a lot of vague plans in my head for the future — dreaming about the time when my ship would come in and all these little problems of dimes and dollars automatically settled. Now I've begun to realize that the ship just isn't coming in at all. I'm still a mechanical draughtsman and not a very remarkable one at that.

"And here's what I'm wondering. Do I want to plug out the rest of my life earning that two-fifty a month and trying to make it seem more? Do I want to chuck all those daydreams and admit I'm just what I am, and give up the

ambitions — just plod it out to the finish? Or do I want to do something about it?

"There happens to be something I can do. I came from a farm down state, to begin with, and there are still sixty or seventy acres lying around that belong to me. Why not pull out and go back there and raise enough to keep myself comfortable? Quit plugging day in and day out at a job that doesn't satisfy me, a job of routine labor, and just go out on the land again?"

He puffed at his cigar and fell into a brown study. When he moved again, it was to make a gesture in the direction of the parlor downstairs. "I'm hopeful of that," he said. "He seems a nice kind of boy and his prospects are good enough. If he likes the girl well enough to marry her, I won't have that to worry about any more. I'll be pretty free again, more free than I've been since the day that son of mine was born.

"I've been struggling so long," he went on, after a moment, "that I hardly remember what I was struggling for. Was it wealth? I'm not so sure. Just success, I suppose, and I never stopped to think what I meant by success. I've worked so hard that I can't even sit down at night and read a book, any more. Forgotten how. Forgotten how to sit back and relax. Maybe it would be nice to sit on that patch of ground and get to living again — just quietly and peacefully — and quit worrying about everything."

He became quite enthusiastic in a contained way, talking of the little crops he would raise, the evenings he would have, the dominion over his own small footstool upon the earth. But then, towards the last, he shook his head.

"You couldn't do it," he said to himself. "You couldn't just pick up and leave Chicago." He looked at me with a

trace of mournfulness and also a trace of resigned amusement on his face. "My wife and I have been excited about Chicago for so long we'd feel lost without it. We've talked so much about the growth, and the crowds, and the future of the city — it's part of us. I'm so used to going to the office in the rush of people and talking about big plans all day — new buildings and new machines and big developments, I would miss it and get lonely. And I've forgotten how to amuse myself when I'm lonely."

He was interrupted by a burst of laughter from downstairs, laughter that was full of gaiety and a fine confidence. He said, "I guess I'll have to get mine out of watching this new generation come along — what they do with the city and their lives."

The story of the Senator does not properly belong to Chicago. I met him there, it is true, but he was not an Illinois Senator. He was a visitor, like myself. Still, he was a representative of that Middle West which is crowned by Chicago. He was, after his fashion, a Middle Western statesman and he drew his life and his intellectual sustenance and his spiritual food from the region that looks to Chicago as its wanton reigning queen. I met him in a club where both of us were guests. On one of the upper floors of the club there was a bar. We were there, my Chicago host and I, for luncheon, but only three or four were standing about, for it was still early. I was introduced to the others, and one of them was the Senator.

It is a rule of the club that guests may not purchase drinks — a privilege reserved for members — but the Senator was in expansive mood and his gracious protestations led to a suspension of the rule. The glasses were handed around, and he lifted his to the level of his eyes.

"Gentlemen," he said, "I drink to your health — to the health of your friends and of your friends' friends. I drink to the fellowship of man and the amity of nations."

I cannot, I am afraid, convey to you the deep and sonorous rhythm of his voice, the sobering eloquence of his lifted face and waving hand, as he delivered himself of the toast. Nor can I do more than suggest the old-fashioned, musical clearing of his throat, as he set the empty glass down upon the bar with a firm gesture.

A profound contentment seemed to pervade his spirit. He was a large man, tall and heavy. The gray hair on his head was brushed close down. A broad black ribbon swept down from his gold-rimmed pince-nez glasses, and behind the glasses his eyes were very blue. His face was ruddy and square and the thrust of his jaw was a little belligerent. He wore a black tail coat and striped gray trousers. His necktie was black and extremely large, and his linen was amazingly white, amazingly thick with starch. Looking at him, it was quite impossible to dodge that tattered phrase — "a fine figure of an old war horse, sixty and still in the prime."

My particular host was skeptical. He whispered to me, "No, I can't believe it. He looks so much like a United States Senator that it can't be true. Wait a minute. I'm going to see." He disappeared, but in a little while he returned with a nod. "Picture in the paper to-day," he said. "He's a Senator all right."

The Senator had a congressman with him. The Congressman, despite the hour of the day, was extremely drunk. He had once been, the Senator explained, a Methodist minister. But he had given over the championship of God for the more immediate needs of government

of the people. An almost constant stream of obscenities came from him. I am not squeamish and I like to call most things by their plain Anglo-Saxon names. But this fellow was a trifle too much. He shall, I fear, pass out of our story with the valedictory of the Senator:

"This man here — " his arm was thrown in an affectionate embrace about the Congressman's shoulder — "This man here is the greatest orator in either house of our national body at Washington. If he ever comes to your town to speak, go to hear him no matter what the subject. You won't be able to make head or tail of what he's talking about — I'll grant that — but it will put the spell on you. He'll bring you out of your seat. He will have you cheering, when you won't know what in the name of the Lord you're cheering for."

We had another drink.

It seemed only polite, it seemed only the respectful and decent thing to do, to make some inquiry about the affairs of state.

"Senator," I said, "how do you think we are going to come out on the Administration's agrarian policy? All that wheat the government owns, you know — and all those bales of cotton?"

He frowned heavily and watched while the attendant filled his glass. Then he said with great care, "Sound. I can only say to you that the policy is sound. I do not follow the details of these matters. But I can say that for my part I am willing to leave these matters in the hands of the President."

"You think then, Senator, that Mr. Hoover is making a pretty good job of it?"

"Let me be clear." The musical clearing of his throat

sounded again, and he put his glass back. "Let me be clear. I'm a Hoover man. Do you know what that means?"

His body swayed backward from his waist and one clenched fist came up to thump against his chest. He closed his eyes for an instant, and spoke now in a deep, quiet tone.

"Gentlemen, you do not really understand the difficulties that beset your government. The times are grave. The ship of state rocks in a cruel storm. We who stand upon the deck of that ship, wondering, perhaps trembling a little as the fierce waves break over us — we think of the pilot. We think of that hand upon the wheel in the darkness, that steady courageous heart, that noble, unconquerable soul. Gentlemen — gentlemen — " He picked up his glass and his voice lifted to a thundering roar, "Gentlemen, I give you Herbert Hoover!"

We lifted our glasses, a little stunned. But then, to our chagrin, he broke into a hearty chuckle. He leaned forward and whispered, as if confidentially, "That's the way to spellbind 'em, eh? I had you!" Then he said, seriously, "I really mean it all, you understand. Every word of it. Hoover is a great man — a great man. But it's the way you say it that counts. Hunh?"

Somebody said, "I'd give a lot, Senator, to hear you make a speech on the floor down at Washington. That would be something to listen to."

But he shook his head lugubriously. He drew a black morocco wallet from his pocket, took from it an extraordinary amount of money in new fifty-dollar bills, and ordered the drinks around. There were more in the room now. The luncheon hour was coming nearer, and there were fifteen or twenty who stood quietly about, listening. But he seemed unaware of them, even when it was

whispered to each newcomer that the center of attention was a Senator of the United States — and even as each newcomer fell into an enchanted watching of him, he was still talking directly to the three or four gathered about him at the bar.

He shook his head lugubriously. "Now you won't believe this," he said. "You won't believe it, but I can't make a speech in the Senate. I haven't been there so very long, you know. And when I get up before all those bigwigs I get hot in the face, my tongue gets thick, and I can't even remembe what I'm talking about. Man, I tremble!" He illustrated with an elephantine shiver that went through his big frame.

"I'll tell you why it is. You'll understand this. Down there on the Senate floor, nobody listens when you're talking. They doze, or fiddle with papers, or talk to each other — or they get right up and walk out on you. Nobody pays any attention. You're just talking for the Record, and I can't get used to that. I'm used to having an audience. It's a habit.

"You never heard much of me up here in Chicago, I guess. But down where I come from I'm pretty famous. Boys, I don't exaggerate when I say I'm the most famous criminal defense lawyer west of the River. And I'm used to looking twelve men in the face, holding them with my words, pleading right down to their hearts for the life of my client. That's the kind of a speech I can make. I can't talk about your agrarian policy or your foreign relations or your budget balancing. But I can talk about the life of some poor devil — whether he is to be hung or set free. That's me. Do you want to see what I mean? By God, I'll show you! Listen. You listen, now."

He took a drink slowly. He arranged the three or four of us in a straight line before him and stared for a long moment into our faces. His voice, when it came, bore no relation to the voice he had previously used. It was quiet, a little broken, the voice of an old and melancholy man who had peered into the black sorrows of the human heart.

He said, very softly, "I want you to think. I want you twelve gentlemen of the jury to think of a simple little white house that sits under three pine trees on a little hill. It is not a fine house. They don't have any electric stove there, nor even a gas stove. Not even an oil stove. Back in a hot kitchen a little woman is bending over an old-fashioned wood-burning range. The heat comes up from it and the smell of simple things cooking. A little cabbage. A little salt pork. A pone of cornbread. You've eaten it, gentlemen. Cabbage and pork and cornbread — long, long ago. . . .

"The eyes of that little woman, as she works away over the simple fare, are red with weeping. Sorrow gnaws at that brave little heart. Grief lies heavy upon that simple soul.

"Now step with me into the little yard. There is a white fence around the little yard. An old-time fence. There is an old-time gate in the fence, hanging on a rusty hinge, and at the gate stands a silent little figure — the figure of a little girl. Blue eyes, and flaxen hair, and cheeks that once were red as the peach. But the cheeks are wan now and sunken with long weeping. The eyes of the little figure look with a childish yearning down the long clay road that leads from this town, from this courtroom.

"She is waiting — " His voice faded out until it was almost inaudible, and several tears rolled down his ruddy

cheeks. The club members stood about as if they were stricken in a trance.

The Senator caught the faintest suggestion of a sob in his throat. "She is waiting, my friends, for Daddy."

He turned and looked with almost heartbreaking pity at a point in the room. "She is waiting," he said, "for that man sitting there. For this defendant, whose simple and pathetic story you have heard.

"The meal the little mother is cooking, it is for this unhappy man. Gentlemen — gentlemen — are you going to say the words that will send this fellow creature walking down that clay road, singing up the long hill, and grasping that little figure in his arms — letting the tears of gratitude fall upon her flaxen hair? Are you going to send him back to that simple dinner to begin life anew — to say an humble grace with thanks to God in his heart?

"Or, gentlemen, will you let that little child wait in vain upon the swinging gate, calling 'Daddy — Daddy — ' and sobbing out her broken little heart? Will you let the cabbage and the corn pone and the meat that is prepared for him with loving hands lie cold and untouched upon the plate?"

He stepped back, mopping his eyes and his brow with a vast white handkerchief. "Gentlemen, in my heart there is faith in the charity and the human sympathy that dwell within your spirits. With grave respect, with confidence that the souls of men have not yet grown to the temper of burnished steel, I give the life of this husband, this father, into your keeping. And with a prayer in my heart, I await your verdict."

There was a period of almost absolute silence. The Senator seemed waiting, and under the hypnotic influence

of his sonorous periods we, too, could think of nothing to do but wait. He burst the spell by going into a thunderous peal of laughter.

"I got you!" he cried. "By God, I got you too! I could get anybody with a speech like that. Did they turn him loose? Certainly they turned him loose, and the worthless scoundrel still owes me three hundred dollars. They nearly ran me out of town when they found he wasn't married — had neither wife nor spawn."

He ordered a fresh round of drinks while we congratulated him upon his eloquence. The money was in his hand again and he held it up for us to see. "There was a little senatorial recreation on the train coming up last night," he said, "and the Gentleman from —— had fortune on his side. Put me down," he cried with enormous good humor, "put me down for the best defense pleader and the best poker player west of the Ozarks — and," he leaned forward and winked, "the sorriest Senator that ever got the votes."

Somebody asked him how he felt about the Prohibition question.

"Dry!" he shouted. "Dry as the pebbly bed of the old Arkansas, when the summer droughts have scorched the land and powdered dust lies where once the rushing waters were wont to purl. I see you laugh, and I am broad-minded enough to laugh with you, my friends. Mr. Bartender, set up another round.

"Even with the mellowing influence of pure distillate running warmly through my old veins, I feel moved to defend the Volstead Act. I have voted and I will continue to vote for a rigid enforcement of it."

"Why?" some one demanded.

"It is for the good of the land," said the Senator, with great dignity. "And furthermore, it is the mandate of my constituency. But wait. Wait. I'll give you my prohibition speech." He lifted his glass high and stood, for all the world, as if he might have been upon a rostrum with ten thousand listening. "Ladies and gentlemen," he began in an even, serious tone, "I come to discuss with you this evening a subject upon which there should be no need for discussion — the subject of law and order, and obedience to the Constitution, and the suppression of the vilest plague ever to haunt the soul and body of man — alcoholic liquor."

Over in a corner of the room, a member of the club's house committee was hot with fury. "That damned old windbag will have to be thrown out of here," he said fiercely. But immediately two or three leaned over him. "Shhh," they said; "you can't throw out a Senator of the United States."

"And why not?" demanded the committeeman. "We would throw out any other man who annoyed us by being a bore and a pompous hypocrite."

But it was not necessary to settle this unhappy issue. A slight incoherence had crept into the Senator's speech on prohibition. And now, as he stepped backward in a sweeping gesture of outflung arms and lifted head, he lost his balance and fell heavily to the floor. The member who had brought him into the club found assistance among the employees and began helping the Senator down the steps to the street. As they worked to guide him through the doorway, we could hear his last words:

". . . and on the subject of the World Court," he was saying, "I stand with the Father of my country, and I will

fight to the last against the entanglements of foreign alliance . . ."

The club member who had brought the Senator to the place came back into the room. He stood at the steps and said, evenly and without smiling, "I wish to apologize, gentlemen, for my mistake. I am sorry if you have been annoyed. The next time I am forced to entertain a member of the United States Senate, I will not force him on the attention of decent people."

I went, the next day, to the country house of an old Chicago family. It was on the shore of Lake Geneva, and it was a fine, unpretentious house set in grounds that were quietly beautiful. A considerable number of guests were there, and I found myself among people who were civilized — by any standard that you might call up. My own standard for a civilized human being is that he shall have knowledge of men and of affairs, an ordered intelligence, a discriminating taste, and urbanity in his behavior, and surely all I met that day possessed such virtues.

These people were filled, all of them, with an intense belief in Chicago as the germinating point for a culture that will be genuinely American. They think of Chicago as the seat of nationalism that will engage itself with the embellishment of existence: the creation of art and literature and music that will give to American life a coherent identity and a distinction.

This was not simply a matter of enthusiastic theory with them. Among the guests were two women who have written novels of the first quality — the wives of rich industrialists they were — the conductor of a symphony orchestra, a native sculptor. Also, they were able to produce a fresh example to support their feeling. He was a

young composer, and he was quite honestly of the people. His father held some small city job, and his mother was a seamstress. She had given all of her earnings to make his musical education possible.

He had brought his opera with him. It was a new opera, and it sounded very good, as three or four of them sketched it out at the piano and the rest of us stood listening.

An elderly man (he had made a great deal of money in the leather business) began murmuring to me. "That is interesting," he said. "But to me the writing of things, the creation of them, is not the most important. Let me tell you . . .

"People in this part of the world have been living in the factory districts and on the farms. They have been working in the shops and offices, planning to get rich and buy all the things they need to make them happy. That was all they thought about — get rich and buy those lovely things. Now it is beginning to dawn on them that they might never get rich, after all. They will never be able to buy the things — which would not make them happy anyway, of course. So they may possibly begin to think.

"I believe they will. They may even begin to see that the things which make a man happy don't cost very much money. Such things just have to be learned, not bought. They have to learn that books are good to read and music is good to hear and pictures are good to look at. That is the kind of culture I am interested in — the culture of listeners, audiences. The culture of creators is going well enough. It will go better, I think.

"The people around here will be the first to learn. They have the vitality, do you see? Their sons and their cousins and their brothers are already painting the pictures and

making the books and music. The creative instinct always comes first, out of the ground, out of nowhere. Then comes the art of enjoyment — the art of discrimination. It is a more difficult thing to learn, in its way, and it comes more slowly. Just now it is having its struggle with the cheap things, cheap movies and cheap music and cheap books. But they will learn better. You would know that they are already learning, if you had the time and the patience to inquire."

The music was going quite beautifully at the piano. The daughter of my hostess — a daughter of the lard industry, the sardonic ones would say, because that is where the family wealth came from — was singing. She had a very beautiful voice, and she was making her début at the civic opera within a few months. The composer and the orchestra conductor were talking about the score with deep enthusiasm. People all around were trying to make me tell them — alas, I could not very clearly — what America is doing, what I had discovered in my travels. . . .

But here is the odd thing. Suddenly, the man who had been murmuring to me about the folk appreciation of art got to his feet and looked at his watch. Others, too, were looking at their watches, and there was a great hurrying to leave. Everybody had to go somewhere and get to work. Not bread-and-butter work, mind you, for all of these people possessed fortunes. They had to get away to committees and planning boards, to radio speeches and political rallies. The women, too, had to go —hospital boards and baby clinics and settlement work and the rescue of juvenile delinquents. Both of the women novelists had half a dozen enterprises beside the writing of novels and the management of their families.

I made the natural inquiries and discovered that there is no real leisure class in Chicago. Work has become so habitual to them that even with wealth won they have to keep on working — and they keep their sons and daughters working too. The men busy themselves with speeches and the rebuilding of Chicago and the new World's Fair that is coming and the making of more money. The women tend the poor and search out talent that should be encouraged and nourish their own newly discovered interest in governmental affairs. All this they do with a furious energy.

From the meanest to the highest in Chicago there is no repose. And I think it is the spot on which they live, the enormous excitement of the city itself, that makes this true. Millions have gathered there. They have already made Chicago the capital of the iron empire and the wheat empire and a dozen other empires besides. They are intoxicated with the rush of their growth. They are determined to make of Chicago the world's biggest city, the world's most beautiful city, the world's richest city and the world's most cultured city. There is not much chance that it will fail to have its fifty millions of population. There is not much doubt that it will dominate the flow of American civilization. But I think that the high pitch of its vitality, the unchanging tension of its thrust, will always remain a little exhausting to the visitor from less favored regions.

I look back upon it now from a certain distance. I try to see it whole, and the outlines are persistently vague. I try to discover the reason for the deep fascination which the city exerts upon me, and I come by stages to these ideas: that it is something being formed — that it is a miracle still in the process of performance — that it is,

yes, there we are, the giant of all giants still in the fœtal state. It is an unborn genius, still nestling in the womb of life, portentous and full of mystery. With what eagerness we may await that happy day when it stands full whelped before us!

III

The Prairies

THERE is an immensity of earth. The flat line of the horizon flows from State to State and then on to State again. Cities huddle against the banks of many rivers, and from the level plain stark villages rise up. There are a million white dots scattered over the emptiness, and the million dots are houses where people live, farming the earth and dreaming whatever dreams are vouchsafed them and worshipping the immemorial gods of rain and sunshine. The concrete roads spin out their endless miles. From the beaneries and the mansions the radio murmurs a ceaseless monotone. The cattle are sleek. The fields are laid out in superb designs and the new cars glitter on the highways.

This is the land the pioneers saw, forgotten years ago, when they fought their bitter way across the Eastern mountains and looked down and shouted that they had found a paradise, dropped to their knees and thanked God for leading them to the promised land. It is the lushest grain country in the world. It holds within its boundaries In-

diana and Illinois, Wisconsin and Minnesota and the Dakotas, Iowa, Missouri, Kansas and Nebraska.

I entered upon the prairie lands at Indianapolis, where a surge of industrial development is subsiding, to leave once again an amiable farmer town on the banks of the river. Most of the people are quite content for the hubbub of the factories to dwindle and fade, for the old familiar quiet to settle back into broad, leafy streets.

Except for a single blemish, Indianapolis is an immensely pleasing town to the eye. They have built a memorial to their war dead. The memorial is a huge, awkward structure, looming in the center of town to dwarf the capitol building and to throw the statues of a quiet little park entirely out of scale. Everybody that I saw apologized for it. Dozens of the citizens had something to say about the grotesque ugliness of it. And I began to ask, "Well, how in the name of heaven did it get there, in the face of such unanimous disapproval?" Nobody could answer. Nobody had a clear idea of the processes which had taken a million dollars out of the public funds, and preëmpted the best site in town, and put up a monstrosity for all of them to stare at and to detest. It seemed the first time any of them had thought of the matter in such a light at all.

I talked to a circuit court judge about it, and he had an explanation. He sat back, and chewed a Kentucky stogie, and grunted forth his views. "You ought to know," he said, "that we are the greatest *ex post facto* nation in the world. Monuments or laws, business enterprise or the fundamental currents of our civilization, we just go about our little ways and let them happen as best they can. We don't lift a finger to make them happen right — as a

people, I mean. But if they happen wrong — why we can squawk louder and longer and with more indignation than a hen robbed of her chicks. We are a nation of critics after the fact. There isn't a man in the country who couldn't tell you, in great detail, all the causes for the business depression and the political debacle. But how many are thinking in terms of to-morrow's business and to-morrow's politics? Of to-morrow's monuments and laws?"

I said, "Why?"

"Plain laziness is part of it," he said. "But that isn't all. The main defect is in the machinery. Let's go back to your monument. I'm a citizen of Indianapolis. I'm interested in the place — love it. I don't want it disfigured by an architect's nightmare. But what is my technique for doing something about it? I can write a letter to the newspapers, when the monument is first proposed, and tell them what kind of monument would be fitting. That would be an amusing futility, though it would probably leave me with a sense of duty done. I could go down before the city fathers and speak my piece. They would receive me with politeness and indifference. They are used to the sort of cranks who have to make a speech about everything. I would become known as a publicity hound.

"No. There is only one thing that is the least effective. And that is to organize public opinion. Go out in the streets and beat together a minority. Get your minority to agree upon a design for the monument — if you can. And then just raise the devil until that particular design is accepted."

He chewed at his stogie and shook his head. "That is the only thing that will work, and who can do it? Who can devote his life to such things when there is bread to

be earned? And who that does devote his life to such things isn't known as a busybody and an agitator?"

I said, "The system is all too complicated."

He said, "The system is simply no good."

I caught a gleam of laughter in his eye. "*Ex post facto*," he murmured, and both of us laughed a good deal.

When I left Indianapolis I went to a new sort of farm. It was a communistic enterprise, directed by a young man whose enthusiasms run to frenzy and whose brand of fire is often an uncouth blazing in the wind, but it seemed to work. Thirty or forty families were living on its profits. The products went into a canning factory, where the women helped with the work and every penny of the income was divided among the laborers. These laborers had only the dimmest notions of the ideals actuating their young leader, but money in the bank was something for all of them to believe in without question.

A sturdy woman with clear eyes and solid convictions on all matters involving right and wrong explained how she felt about it. "When they first put it up to me," she said, "I was mad enough. I thought they meant all of this Bolshevik free love business and down with the church. But it works all right. I don't know whether I'm a Communist or a Democrat, and I'm not going to listen to any of that wild preaching. I'm not going to have any truck with revolutions. But when you know you are getting share and share alike with all the others, you have to feel satisfied, don't you?"

Most of the neighbors round about, however, and most of the press in the region disliked the communal farm. They disliked it on some vague principle, though few of them had taken the trouble to look at it or inquire into

its program. They were instinctively afraid of it, and they covered their fear with a faint running fire of contemptuous shafts. It was in all respects an embattled enterprise, and those within its ranks felt sharply that they were, after a manner of speaking, pariahs.

I think that it offered a very clear suggestion that radical thought among the farmers is not an active thing. Certainly, it requires no access of hysteria in our statesmen.

Across the Indiana line, not very far from Peoria in Illinois, I talked to another farmer. He was a husbandman of the old style, lean and grave and thoughtful. He had learned his reading and writing in a country school, and he had got married and settled down to a lifetime of work on the thousand acres he had inherited. His wife sat across the fireplace, speaking proudly now and then of her two sons in college and wanting to know what the women did in New York — how they dressed and how they amused themselves. She, too, had worked very hard.

The farmer said, "We're not running things the right way. I don't mean the government. I mean the farmers themselves. For most of them, a piece of land is just a business. They gouge every nickel they can out of it and care nothing about it.

"My grandfather was a homesteader here. He took care of this land, and my father took care of it, and I have taken care of it. I guess we loved it. Anyway, we planned that we would keep it always in the family, and I was glad when our children were boys so they could keep on with the work. But when the boys grew up it was the fashion to send them to college. I had to send them. I wanted them to be educated, to get the best. But what has education meant to them? It's meant that they will never be farmers.

One of them will be a lawyer and the other will go into some town business. When I die, they'll sell out the land at the best price they can get, and that's the end of the homestead."

His wife said: "The farms all around the country keep changing hands. The banks and the loan companies take them, or the big corporations buy them up to work in big acreage with a lot of laborers. You don't find many farmers now who really know the land they're working."

The farmer was desperately against all forms of syndicalism, of coöperative selling. He was against the communal farm in Indiana, about which I told him. "It just ain't the way to farm," he said, shaking his head quite mournfully. "If farming has any meaning at all to it, you've got to have a feeling about your land — know your fields and your furrows like you know yourself — and have your own way of getting crops out of it. It ain't like running a factory. But we're going that way mighty fast in this country. Factory farming!" He spat savagely and nursed his anger.

I said, "What do you do besides farm? With your life, I mean?"

"A farmer," he said, "don't do anything besides his reg'lar farming. That is, if he's worth being called a farmer."

I said, "No books to read?"

No. No time to waste on that. He went to church on Sunday when it didn't storm too bad. He had the preacher to dinner sometimes and argued with him. But the preacher didn't have much backbone. He didn't have the right ideas about hell fire or paradise either.

"I read the campaign speeches," he said, "and I vote on

election day. I pay my taxes like an honest man, and I run my life to suit myself."

It was refreshing to sit there and talk with him. He was in the full tradition of the American type — a type that has changed very sharply in two generations. Most of us have been led to think casually of the genuine American as a fellow who looks a good deal like Uncle Sam: lean and grizzled, grave of brow, talking little and smiling less, and more than likely to have the splinter of a chip always on his shoulder. It is a little strange, in the face of this legend, to find so many faces wrinkled into the lines of a permanent grin, to find in the air a constant echo of wheezes and wisecracks, comebacks and chuckles. It is a little strange to find that old race, forward and boasting and permanently belligerent, given way to a race which is diffident and meek, disparaging itself and its accomplishments, amiable to the end. All over the country I looked for faces with a touch of grimness in them, some harshness of purpose and a hint of iron in the soul. And when, betimes, one would swim out of the pageant, I found myself inordinately pleased.

This discontented farmer was of that breed. His life was barren enough, God knows. No amenities had ever brushed against him. Deprived suddenly of the right to plow his furrows and harangue his beasts, he would have been utterly and hopelessly lost. But somehow it was satisfying to watch him and to listen to him. Somehow it appeased an obscure hunger, simply to hear him curse his fellows.

"They're tame," he said. "Tame. Nobody knows how to farm any more. They don't even know how to cuss with any spirit."

My way led toward the west, and whenever I saw a farmhouse that stirred my curiosity I stopped and talked a while. There was one I remember — a few miles from the town of Fairfield in Iowa. It was a very large house, beautifully set among the trees. The meadows full of grazing cattle and sheep made a pastoral frame for it, and there were larks crying against a blue sky. The owner of the house was fifty but he looked much younger. His wife seemed younger still, and both of them had a certain quickness of eye, a certain eagerness of expression. I learned, before long, that they had been most of the way around the world, and the souvenirs they had brought back showed a sure taste for beauty in one of them if not both — good etchings from England, and some Japanese pottery, and rugs from Persia.

This farmer said, after a time, that he was quite ruined — but he quickly declined my polite offer of sympathy. "Let's see," he said, "what my ruin really amounts to. We were talking about it last night.

"If you look out that window you will see a twenty-acre field. It's all I own. Four years ago I had more than two thousand acres — but that same twenty-acre field was what I got married on. We built up the farm. We bought in the land lying all around us. We raised big crops and we sold them for good prices. When my boy and girl came along we educated them, sent them to good schools. We bought everything they could think of to make the house comfortable — electricity and gas and fine plumbing. We had two or three automobiles.

"My wife and I wanted to travel and so we did. We didn't do it on the cheap and we bought whatever we liked. All of that cost money, of course, and we began mortgag-

ing the land. When the hard times came along, the mortgages were foreclosed and I lost all but my original twenty acres. That sounds like bad luck, don't it? But remember what I started on. It was mighty few dollars. Fifty dollars, to be exact, was the original investment. All right. I lived a mighty fine life for twenty-five years on that fifty dollars. Had everything I wanted, did everything I wanted to do, raised my children right.

"Now I'll put out my little lines again. I'll pick up a little money here and there and buy some more land at bottom prices. When the prices go up I'll sell out and move to town and forget that I ever was a dirt farmer."

I said, "Then you really don't like being a farmer at all?"

He and his wife talked about that. They wondered whether they might have managed a fuller life out of anything else. They remembered the hard and satisfying labor, the loveliness of spring close to the earth, and the deep contentment of the harvest home. But then, at the last, they shook their heads. They really didn't care about the farmer's life. Too remote from politeness, from the manners of living that are so easily learned from the movies and the radio. They agreed that they had gone to farming at the outset because it was the only life open to them upon such meager capital, and that they had worked fiercely to make the best of it, and that their greatest contentment grew from the fact that they had released their children from the bondage of the soil.

In all conscience — remembering so many farmhouses that I had entered — it was difficult to disagree with them. The romanticist can summon up a fine defense of husbandry: its noble simplicity, the enduring quality of the

festivals of seasons, the warmth of the most complete domesticity on the earth. But the defect lies in the fact that farm life in the Middle West simply does not possess these virtues in our time. It has lost the one thing which might have seemed inseparable from it, the basic element of rusticity. They are no longer rustics at all, those who farm the prairies, but people located at an inconvenient distance from town.

Folk ways are gone, and folk wisdom, because they are not necessary. They serve no purpose. The United States Weather Bureau, rather than an eye trained in the lore of clouds and winds, prophesies to-morrow's weather. Specialists from the town can perform neatly in a moment all those small miracles which once fed and stimulated the farmer's ingenuity. The folk festivals do not echo against the walls of a quaintly decorated barn, but crowd the Elk's hall, in the midst of a scattering of imitation oak leaves. The domesticity is too intimate and too uncomfortable, because all the prairie farmhouses are too small. Big houses are too difficult to heat in winter.

I have already spoken with a certain pleasure of the seemliness and comfort that are so general in the homes of the upper class. I ask permission, now, to say that the houses of the simple folk upon the prairies are probably the most dismal on the earth. Their architecture is without meaning and without imagination. The preference is for mail-order bungalows, and in the midst of their incongruous flat roofs, their square and lumpy columns, their meager windows, nothing relieves the grinding ugliness. They are not, in any real sense, homes at all. They are merely bad arrangements under a single gable of small and crowded rooms. One thinks of English cottages and

French farmhouses made out of stone, and falls into the notion that American cottages, American farmhouses, are but makeshift structures. No air of permanence hangs over them. You know instinctively that their occupants have no affection for the walls between which they live, for the hearthstone or the square of earth before the door.

Within, mail-order furniture stands awkwardly upon garish mail-order carpets. Bold and ugly lithograph prints obscure the walls, and the electric bulbs so often beat down upon the scene with an unshaded glaring. It is no wonder that in the midst of such scenes human voices are harsh and brittle, that the food is uncommonly bad, that human dreams do not beat their fragile wings with strength enough to soar very far above the black soil.

I drove up to such a house one day, and stopped. I was still in Iowa, but far from the concrete roads, at the end of a winding dirt lane that went between many wind-blown trees. I talked to Lurty. I never learned his last name and I learned his first only by chance. It was a Sunday afternoon, and as I came to a halt in the dusty yard before the dim-yellow bungalow, there were three or four men in overalls pitching horseshoes. I had hardly apologized for interrupting the game when a woman's sharp voice came from the back porch.

"Lurty!" she called.

He answered and went on talking to me for a moment. But she called again, and this time there was an angry insistence in her voice. He was a heavy, bearded fellow, and he shuffled off like a dog to the whistle. When he came back, he was grinning.

"That's a joke on you and me both," he said. "She thought you were a salesman of something or another. Was

telling me I couldn't buy anything from you — not anything at all. I guess she's right, too. I' been mighty easy for them salesmen. Washing machines and automatic feeders and stock medicine — I even bought some stuff to make the hens lay two for one. Believed the fellow, too. Some mighty smooth tongues in this world, I'll tell you."

I said, "And now — no more buying, eh?"

He laughed deep and long, and his friends joined with him. "Lord, man," he said. "They've quit trying to sell that stuff in this neighborhood. No matter how willing a man is to buy, it don't help much if he can't pay."

Another man said, "Relief to get rid of 'em, too. Good riddance, I say."

I asked Lurty to tell me how he was getting along.

"I'm a tenant here," he said. "Got ninety acres of right good land. Don't know who owns it, and nobody else knows, I guess. The landlord borrowed up on it and the loan company took it over, but they don't want it, and it's just sort of kicking around. Nearly all the land hereabouts belongs to the banks or the loan companies. They're worried to death, holding so much property they don't want and can't use, but their agents are on to your business better than you."

The other man said, "That's a true statement. I'll tell you, it's a true statement."

Lurty said, "They'll come around and sidle up and lay out with, 'Well, I hear you had a new calf born yesterday.' Before you've got done easin' the cow a little, they're around to tell you that they'll take the calf to settle part of your rent."

He picked up a horseshoe and threw it at the far stake, watching it settle down out of the air and strike the earth

with a little spurt of dust. He wiped his hands slowly on his overalls and said, "There ain't ten per cent. of the land in this whole county owned by the men that's farming it. Now that don't seem right, does it? More than fifty per cent. of the farmers are tenants, and they don't know who their landlord is from one day to the next. Out of the other fifty per cent., most of it is foreclosed on. People go around saying, 'My farm' and 'My land' — but that's just boasting."

The other man said, "You see that farm over there on that hill, 'way over yonder under the trees? Well, that's a good example. Nine hundred acres of the finest corn land you ever saw. Fellow name of Bailey used to own it, owned it outright, not a penny of mortgage, and he made money with his crops too. Died about a year ago and left three sons. They didn't want any farming. They just borrowed and borrowed, and when the mortgages came due they said to the bank, 'Take it. Take the land. We don't want it nohow.' That's the way the farming business is in this country."

Lurty had been musing, heavily, with a frown on his face. Now he said, "That don't make any difference. None of that makes any real difference. Look. There's the land — " His hand swept out in a gesture toward the gentle roll of the earth. "Yes, sir, there's the land. And here's the farmers." He pointed at his chest and looked at his companions. "They can shift the land around and say one owns it to-day and another to-morrow. They can mortgage and foreclose, borrow and buy and sell. But the farming don't stop, does it? The land don't change any, does it? Clapping a new deed on a piece of acreage don't make it any better for corn, or any worse, does it?"

He shook his head very slowly. "No, sir. You can't change the fields and you can't change the men that work 'em. The farming just goes on. We do that. And we keep on eating pig and beef, corn and wheat and greens. The kids get some kind of learning, one way and another. So what's the use of talking about it? Just keep your crops coming and cuss the prices you get and try to manage a little drink for yourself now and then on Saturday nights. That's all you can do."

I could go on with reports of this nature for a very long time, because I talked to hundreds of farmers. Perhaps the examples I have chosen indicate that there is no real farmer's viewpoint — no way for me to say, "This is how farmers think and live." Among these tillers of the wheat basin there is a very great diversity of feeling for the land, of theories for raising crops, of economic and political organization. For all the similarity of the threadbare pattern by which their workaday lives are ordered, there is no convention of thinking among them. They are, on the whole, as suspicious of each other as they are of the rest of the world, and it would seem that their suspicions and their faint recurrent bitterness are justified, for their lives are as bare of decoration as the prairies on which they work out their years. The excitements of the prairie are in a low key, like the landscape. It is an undramatic part of the earth, and the people there are undramatic. Their problems are immediate and pressing, and give them no time to think of existence as a thing holding broader implications than feeding and breeding. When they might, occasionally, stop and think a little, when there is a pause in the incessant toil, the assault of modern life upon their senses is so urgent that they are anæsthetized to medi-

tation. The radio beats loudly in their ears, the movies unfold before their eyes a train of dim unrealities, the car is always ready for a stupefying whirl down the road, past the filling stations and the hamburger joints and the little towns that rise up so abruptly and so identically like one another out of the even land. In the midst of such a life nobody could think. Nobody at all.

Most of the farmers talked about their children. Most of them had poignant hope that the education of the children would somehow justify the crushing labor of the wheat fields and the corn fields. So I went to three or four of the colleges to see how the boys and girls were taking to their learning.

One of these colleges was the University of Wisconsin at Madison. It is an immense school. Some ten thousand young men and women pursue the eternal verities through its innumerable lecture rooms. The president is a man of brilliance and reputation. The setting is almost perfect — a hundred buildings thrown carelessly along the slope of a magnificent hill, with lawns and college elms and a lake that can be viewed through a miracle of changing colors for the price of a short climb. But, unhappily, most of the people with whom I talked said that nobody much was getting an education.

The students were more explicit in their views. I met them in the sitting room of a fraternity house, a very pleasant room it was, and they were of all sorts. Most of them were the sons of farmers, though some were the sons of tradesmen and artisans, and they were studying everything from journalism to medicine. All of them had intelligence written in their faces — intelligence and the first faint cloud of disillusionment.

I asked them questions:

One of them said, "Oh, we're disappointed. I know I am, and I think all of us are. You see, when you're down in the country, thinking of the marvelous things you are going to learn at college, you get some big enthusiasms. But you come up, and it's so crowded everywhere, and the things they teach you — well, they don't seem so very impressive. You get the idea that there must be more knowledge in the world than that, and you're just failing to hear about it."

Another boy said, "They teach mathematics well enough. Such things as anatomy and mechanical engineering are all right. But they're facts. You could learn the facts just as well at home, if you had the books. There's no real teaching in the sciences and the liberal arts."

The first boy said, "Here's an example. I'm taking a course in economics. Well, there never has been a more interesting economic situation in the world than we have now. But they don't discuss it with us. They don't give us a background and let us work out views of our own. They keep us back in the classics — Henry George, and the Napoleonic system, and Alexander Hamilton.

"They don't talk about what's going on now because they're not allowed to. You take last week — the president made a speech to the senior class. He told us a little something about world affairs, in the present I mean. Something about the politics of it, and the international relations, and the situation America is in. He told us it was the most important thing we could do — to drop some studying on routine stuff if necessary, and learn something about the world as it is right now.

"Well, the next day there were editorials in the news-

papers and there were long statements from the regents, saying the president had made a big mistake. They said the business of a college was to teach facts out of books and not to encourage students to have opinions about current things. You see what I mean?"

He seemed very despondent. Another boy picked him up and went on eagerly. "But you can't blame the professors. It's the system. Big state colleges run by state money and by politicians. You couldn't expect much better."

I said, "How many want to be educated — really — out of your ten thousand?"

Not very many, they agreed. Most were engaged in a four-year frolic, wasting their time, wasting everybody's time. I asked how many, of those who came from farms, were going back when they left school. None, was the answer. They seemed to have a genuine horror of returning to the isolation and the labor of the earth. They thought of the farms as prisons, and the chief virtue of education was to set them free.

We talked about general things. (There were about thirty boys in the room.) There was no real interest in politics or religion. They knew the facts about the method of governing the country because they were studying such things, but government was to them remote and impersonal. It had never occurred to them that they had a stake in it, that they were a part of it. All of them were sorry that they had missed the last war but seemed convinced that there would be another one, and nearly all were looking forward to it with a mild enthusiasm. They knew very little and cared very little about the rest of the country, and most of their ideas fell into the easy banalities: New England was dead. The South was a land of lynch-

ing bees and sentimental memories of the Civil War. Chicago was a place where bullets flew all day. New York was nothing but Broadway, crowded with noisy Jews. The Pacific Coast was a combination movie colony and real-estate development.

It was quite easy to observe that their whole conception of America stemmed from Mr. Mencken's writings. His gusty contempt and his virile prose had taken firm root in most of them, and most of them accepted his findings as gospel without further inquiry. On the other hand, I could find among them no interest in the fresher streams of American literature. Most of them had read a little of Lewis and Cabell and Dreiser, but nobody had read Hemingway or Faulkner or Thomas Wolfe. Only three or four had ever seen a professional production in the theater, and none had read the printed plays of Eugene O'Neill. They all cursed the movies — and most of them went to the movies at every opportunity. None was interested to the least extent in music or painting.

In short, they were extremely bright young men who, for some reason, were failing altogether in the acquisition of that thing we call culture. They were eighteen and nineteen and twenty years old — one or two a few years older — but they were still boys. Their learning was altogether sketchy, their judgments were altogether immature, and most of them appeared to lack even the beginnings of that curiosity, that bold hunger for knowledge which is the beginning of education. They had the vaguest possible plans for the disposal of their lives when once their degrees were gained. None that I found had undertaken to establish for himself even a tentative approach to life, even a tentative viewpoint toward the pleasures and the

pains, the victories and the failures that might reasonably be expected of existence. Before my journey was done I went to many other colleges. I talked to a very great number of college students, but my evening in the fraternity house at Madison remained a fair cross-section. And from my inquiry I acquired this notion: that by its postponement of genuine responsibility, by the economic shelter it affords and the trivial demands it makes upon ingenuity and courage and intelligence, college life has set backward the age of maturity in America a considerable number of years. When they leave school, somewhere between twenty-one and twenty-five years old, they are still boys, naïve and a trifle aimless. They are still absorbed with wishful notions of what they will do when they grow up.

For their part, the professors are quite as ready to admit that the students are not being educated. They, too, blamed the system. They blamed the quality of men who go into teaching as a profession (all professors seem to have a faint contempt for all other professors). And they blamed the quality of the material they have to work with.

A young professor of physics — I was still at Madison — put it more clearly than any other. "How many," he asked, "out of ten thousand boys and girls, how many are really educable? Most of them can learn the answers out of the books, of course. Pass the examinations after a fashion. But ninety per cent. of them could not be educated in any college on earth. They simply do not possess the eagerness and the flexibility of mind, the downright gray matter to get hold of knowledge.

"But here's the one thing that worries me most of all. Colleges like this were founded — in these agricultural States, I mean — chiefly to refine the minds of farm boys

and farm girls, so that they might go back to their homes and enrich the routine of farm life with their imagination and their knowledge, lessen the hardship of its labor. In theory, our job is to make educated people out of farmers, broaden their culture, make farming a better way of living than it has ever been before. But in practice, we're doing no such thing. We are turning out hordes of men and women with just enough learning to despise the simplicity and the sternness of the life they came from. We have taught them to hate the more obvious stupidities, but we have not taught them how to do anything about it. We give them just enough to shut them off from their old way of life and not nearly enough to open up a new way of life. We leave them hanging in the air — and that is why you hear so many of them grumbling at the futility of existence, cursing the half-baked civilization in which they live."

"All right," I said, "what's the answer?"

He shook his head. "It's just like so many things in our country — our time. Anybody with a grain of sense can see what's wrong. Nobody has any clear idea what to do about it. Even if a man came along with a clear idea, he could never get enough people to believe in it — nothing would ever be done to make the idea work."

"Drift," I said.

"Drift," he repeated. "The only way that anything can happen in America. Drift."

· 2 ·

Along the rolling plains of South Dakota I encountered another kind of youth. He waved at me from the side of the road as I drove along, and I stopped to pick him up.

He wore no hat, and his only coat was a jacket of imitation leather. He had no baggage in his hand, but he was on his way from a little town in Missouri to Lewiston, Montana, where his uncle had a ranch. He was just under twenty. He had finished up with school when he was fifteen.

As we drove along those endless miles of road, the barren reaches of plain on every side and no trees to blur the iron line of the horizon, he talked about himself.

"I left home with a dollar," he said. "I've covered a thousand miles in three days, had three squares a day, and slept in a bed every night. And I've still got fifty-five cents."

I congratulated him. He said, "It's practice. I've had a lot of practice. Had to do it, my family has moved around so much."

I said, "Tell me about your family."

He said, "Well, I guess there's not so much to tell. We were living in this Missouri town when I was born. My father ran a little store there, and we owned the house we lived in. I had a brother and a sister, but she was younger than I was. Born later. I was about ten years old when my father died, and when I was about twelve my mother married a fellow. He had a lot of big ideas, and pretty soon he had the store and the house sold, and right much money in the bank.

"We got everything together, the three kids and a little furniture and stuff, and started out in an old Buick for Florida. My stepfather said he always had wanted to go to Florida, and my mother would do anything he told her. We went to Florida all right, and about halfway down the State we pulled up, and settled, and bought a

little house on the outskirts of a town, and started a hog farm.

"That hog farm went well right from the start. I can remember those days mighty plain — all three of us kids and our mother working with the pigs, and going into town to sell them, and having a pretty good time, all together. Yes, we were pretty happy. It wasn't long before my mother knew, just like the rest of us, that the fellow she'd married was no good. He never did any work around the hog farm. And so, after about six or seven months, we all told him to get out. I was about fourteen and my brother was seventeen and that little sister of mine was about twelve. We all sat in the dining room after he had finished a big supper, and my mother told him to go away. All of us told him to go, too, and after a while he got up and put on his hat and left. I never have seen that fellow since and I don't want to.

"Well, we kept on making money out of the hogs. I guess we made too much money, because we all got big ideas again. We sold out the hog ranch, and moved into town, and invested all the money in Florida real estate. You know what happened then. We went bust, that's what happened. And all of us decided to go back to Missouri.

"We didn't have enough money to go back on the train. We put mother and that little sister on the train, and my brother and I hitch-hiked. It wasn't so bad, and they didn't beat us much, either. But when we all met at Aunt Mary's house, we found there wasn't a dollar in the crowd, and we couldn't stay there on Aunt Mary because her boy Joe had just died. He was thirteen when he died. A funny kind of kid, always doing peculiar things. Once he starved

himself for nearly two weeks — some idea he had — and they had to whip him to make him eat.

"He had just died a couple of weeks before we came back. Sort of wasted away, Aunt Mary said. Our family ran into a lot of hard luck that way. You take Aunt Nell's boy, Joe. Only child he was, and Aunt Nell's husband dead. Joe was the brightest one of the whole lot. Went through the University and had a lot of promise in him, but he died.

"Well, as I was saying, we didn't have any money, so my brother and I went out and began picking up odd jobs at garages and places like that. Changing tires, and going errands, and working helper on delivery trucks. We got a little money together. Then we decided we had done so well at hog farming in Florida we'd try it in Missouri. So about two years ago all of us moved out to a hundred-acre place that was for rent, and laid in some stock. It went all right for a year, and we had cash in the bank at Christmas.

"Then my brother got married. Just showed up one night and said, 'Well, folks, meet the wife.' That hurt my mother a good deal, him just getting married and never telling her anything about the girl, not inviting her to the wedding. You know.

"That marriage changed everything. The girl was fine. We all liked her. But you see she had made my brother get religion, and there wasn't any getting along with him at all after that. He and I did all the work on the farm. We always were buddies before his marriage. But nobody could have got along with him after he began to preach to us all the time. We couldn't do anything that was right. Especially me. You see, working around a lot of hogs all the time, you're liable to lose patience and yell

at 'em. Every time I said anything like 'damn' he would knock me down. He would bawl at me over the supper table about how I was going to hell if I didn't stop swearing so much, and he just turned into a regular bully.

"I guess I could have stood it all right if that kid sister of mine hadn't got married too. That sort of broke me up, because I thought a lot of that girl. Oh, the fellow she married was all right. Ran a little dairy business, and I guess they'll get along. But just to think of her being married, young like that, got me down. I was in a mind to leave the place from that time on.

"And then I had that fight with my brother. We got a letter saying that Aunt Sylvia, my mother's youngest sister, was in the hospital. She was having a baby — and you know how a thing like that worries people. My brother went down to see her and tried to make her tell him who the man was. Did a lot of preaching and threatening. But of course she wouldn't tell him. You couldn't expect her to do that.

"When my brother came home, he jumped all over my mother, saying her family was no good, and a lot of things like that. When they got to quarreling pretty hard, he slapped my mother. I guess I sort of saw red. I told him he was a fine sort of Christian, to do all that preaching about little things like saying 'damn' and then to slap his own mother. I told him no man could hit my mother, and I went for him. He was bigger than me, but he was a coward. He yelled to me to stop and said he wouldn't fight — said it was against his religion to fight. But I didn't pay any attention to that. I broke two of his ribs and did his face up pretty bad. And after that, of course, I couldn't stay around. I wrote this uncle of mine

in Montana that I was coming and here I am — on my way."

I said, "Tell me something about your friends. Tell me about the morals of this younger generation — the kind of people you know."

"Well," he said, "I guess most of the girls drink and swear pretty bad, and all of 'em smoke. I never smoke or swear, not any more, but I take a little drink sometimes."

I said, "Girls pretty loose?"

He said, "Oh, sure. Most of 'em are pretty loose, all right. Gee, I'll tell you a funny story. . . .

"My pal was a boy named Curly, and we used to go over to a dance resort called Baker's Beach. Well, one night we picked up a couple of dames there — from the county high school — and rode way down the country to another resort, called Mike's Pavilion. We were dancing around and having a pretty good time when some cops came in and arrested Curly and me. There had been a hold-up in town, some filling station, and they picked us for the bandits. We told 'em we were innocent, but they ran us on over to the jail. We had brought the girls over in a Chevvy that I had borrowed, and here they were — no way to get back home. I tried to tell the cops about it and make some arrangements for getting the girls home, because their families would be so sore with them. But all I got out of that was a busted arm. The cops beat us up pretty bad. And all the time, those girls were downstairs raising hell. They called those cops every name you ever heard of. I never heard such swearing. And finally the cops took them home, just to get rid of them, I guess.

"The next day they caught the real bandits, and of

course they let us go. But that sort of made us friendly with those two girls and we began to see them a lot.

"They were a lot of fun. You know — petting or anything — pretty wild, to tell the truth. And Curly and I got an idea. We said 'Look here. Let's reform those girls, just for the fun of it.' So we went to work. We gave 'em a long talking-to and began to twist their arms whenever they swore or tried to smoke a cigarette or take a drink. We wouldn't pet with 'em, or anything, and told 'em we were going to make decent citizens of 'em. Made 'em go to church with us, and prayer meeting, and just naturally laid down the law to 'em.

"Well, sir, in three weeks we had those two girls as meek as lambs. Two or three of the other boys who knew them and went out with them sometimes came around complaining to us. They said we had ruined those girls, as far as having any fun with 'em was concerned. Wanted to know what the dickens we had done."

He laughed. "But we didn't say anything. Never said a word. After that, we got a big kick out of finding girls that tried to act bad and reforming them. It was more fun than all the wild parties you could think of."

I said, "Yes. I suppose it's just born in you."

He did not understand.

"Oh, that urge to reform people," I said. "It's in your blood, in this part of the world. You just can't stand it unless you are making somebody else behave."

"Isn't that all right?" he asked. "Isn't that Christian?"

"How about yourself?" I asked. "Breaking your brother's ribs and cadging your way across the country, living on gifts you wheedle out of strangers?"

"But I don't swear or smoke," he said. "I thought I

was doing those girls a favor. I still don't see anything wrong in what I did."

I said, "Spiritual offspring of Sankey and Moody." But I did not bother to explain any further when he asked what I meant by that.

I bought his supper for him and asked him about his career — what he intended to make out of his life. He had done all sorts of odd jobs in addition to his labor on the pig farm, but he wanted to be a printer. "I guess I'll own a shop some day," he said. "That's the only way to get anywhere, own a shop yourself. But I've got to see something of the world, first. I've got to get around."

The roads are full of boys and girls seeing something of the world. And the beaneries are full, too, for these simple roadside eating houses provide most of the jobs for transient workers. I fell into the habit of asking waitresses and counter men, filling-station attendants and bell boys, "What kind of town is this?" More often than not, the answer came back, "Don't know. Only been here a few days myself."

You get the impression that most of the young people who are not in colleges are drifting. None of them seem definitely settled, definitely launched upon workaday lives. They drift slowly, working a few weeks and pushing on to a new stopping place. "Seeing the world and looking for a good time," most of them will say, until you feel that all of America is a weaving back and forth of youth, a slow shuttle that embroiders a meaningless design upon the pattern of days and nights.

They find their amusements in the public dance halls for the most part, and it may surprise you to learn that these are highly moral establishments as a rule — moral

to the point of primness and a slightly annoying self-righteousness. In my journey through the prairies I dropped into two of them in time to join the celebration of painfully respectable weddings — weddings of those who had met on the floor, wooed to the beat of the banjo and the whine of the saxophone, and found their sure way to a specially advertised public ceremony: the jazz band playing the wedding march for a change, and everybody made happy by valuable souvenirs, the gift of a generous management.

· 3 ·

The incredible sweep of the Dakotas is a lonely place. Lonely and desolate. The empty rolling earth is beautiful in some melancholy fashion, and at night there is a queer, aching sort of friendliness in the far gleam of a lamp behind some farmhouse window. But there are no trees. The vast land is bare under a vast sky. The voice lifts and dies without an echo, and all life seems a trivial accident upon the face of a forbidding world.

I went, a little too boldly perhaps, to several of those lamps shining in the darkness. I made my way down the rough side roads with the snow drifted white and very high, and knocked at doors, and asked for permission to come in. The hospitality was unfailing, a greedy sort of hospitality that sprang from the terrible hunger to see an unfamiliar face, to hear a new voice.

They did not have much to say, for in their wild lonesomeness they seem to have lost the power of ready speech. They wanted to listen to news of places that were glamorous to them: New York, Chicago, the cities of crowds and lights and noise.

The women protested that they were happy. They felt an instinctive worthiness in the labors they performed and they were strong in defense of the rewards that they received — children and warm fires and an honest partnership with their husbands. But something haunted the eyes of all I saw.

I do not think that women surrender to the loneliness and the drudgery of bleak places as easily as men do. With a surer instinct for the fullness of existence, they cling for a longer time to the illusions, to the promise of romance. And they continue to hunt for something beyond the blunt realities of work, food, a roof, and the bringing forth of children. You could see that vague desire in the lift of the face, the sudden forgetfulness of the task in hands that never rest, as they leaned forward to ask, "What is it like, New York? Are all the women bad there? Is everybody rich?"

I said to one who asked that (she sat against a whitewashed fireplace in a low room, with the lignite smoldering. The lamplight was kind to her worn face, and a dark shawl that she wore about her shoulders softened the outline of her head. She was still young, as years go, and a few fires were still alive in her). I said, "What you really miss is the chance, isn't it — the chance to decide whether you will be good or bad? What you miss is the lovely temptation. . . ."

She laughed with a good deal of confusion.

Her husband was immersed in plans: specific plans that would determine to-morrow's conduct, plans for crops, and the working of fields, and the repair of mechanical plows. I asked him what he thought of various things, the political situation, the education of his chil-

dren, such matters of a general cast. But he had no answers, no opinions.

"My father came from Norway to farm this land," he said. "He taught me to farm it. I keep on farming it. And what happens to anything else I don't care. I don't have the time to think about all those things. We are too far away to count, anyway."

I said to the woman, "When was the last time you left the farm?"

"Two years ago," she said. "My father died, and I went to the funeral."

There was a younger woman, not married, who talked with less restraint across her desk late one afternoon in a square white schoolhouse that sat blankly beside the road. The children in her charge were leaving for home, and her angular old automobile was standing at the door.

When we had talked for a few moments, she suddenly demanded, "What can I do in New York? Or Chicago — any of those cities. Could I make a living there?"

I told her that many did.

"Well," she said harshly, "I'm going. Maybe I can get through the school year — that's duty to the children I suppose — but I'm going."

She stared at me. "You don't know what it's like," she said. "You're just driving through. On these still winter nights . . ." She shivered. "And it's worse when you listen to the radio and hear people laughing and talking a thousand miles away in some dancing place. You cry."

I said, "Two years in one of those cities and you will scratch anybody who says your prairies are lonely. You will be saying that these empty stretches of snow, and no trees, are the most beautiful things on earth. The wide

sweep of clear horizon, the clean sweet air . . ." She interrupted me with a gesture of despair. Then, after a moment, I went on again. "It's an odd thing. Your fathers came out here, from the East or from somewhere, and went through all sorts of hardship, breaking the new ground and bringing life to the wilderness. Yet all you can think of, your generation, is getting back to the cities. What does that mean? Why is that?"

"It means," she said, "that women weren't meant to live in any such place — a place so lonely. You feel your life going away so fast, and you can't do anything. You aren't living at all."

I said, "That, my dear, is not simply a matter of geography."

But she was in no mood for philosophic platitudes. She asked questions for a time. Specific questions: How much does it cost to live in the city? How is the money earned? Then she went away down the road in her unsteady old car. It was somehow appalling to watch her, and her solitary presence made the wide reach of land seem even more empty and forlorn.

· 4 ·

The prairie cities are four, Minneapolis and St. Paul in the north, St. Louis and Kansas City in the south. Yet, for reasons which I cannot explain very clearly, they do not seem integral with that endless earth. They do not seem like logical outgrowths from their environment, but accumulations of buildings and people, set by chance in the midst of the grain country. Economically, of course, they are logical outgrowths. They are the markets where the grain is brought for sale and where the manufactured

goods of a thousand industries are distributed to the farmers. But in the way of culture and emotion and habits of thought, the cities are slight kin to the earth they crown so handsomely.

On the other hand, they are clearly kin to one another. These four cities, more than any others in the country, fit the conventional pattern, the established conception of American metropolises. They are exactly as you might have thought they would be, and aside from the superficialities of contour and street design, they are virtually identical.

You feel that the thousands who live in them are not an accretion from the farms. You feel that they came from other cities, that they were of the urban breed to begin with, and that the level fields which begin at the suburbs are as foreign to them as to you or me.

This impression is strengthened when you begin to meet them. For so many belong to that race of genteel nomads who move eternally about the country at the behest of sales directors and marketing engineers. They are the employes of big corporations, and the dim exigencies of business require that they move their homes every four or five years. Each of them has a train of vague memories behind him: of that pleasant four or five years spent in Atlanta, of the success and promotion that rewarded hard work in Columbus, of temporary homes and temporary friendships scattered all about the land.

I remember a luncheon to which I was invited in Minneapolis. It was Saturday, and after the luncheon all of us were to go to a football game. Ten or twelve men and women were there, in a very large house full of superb walnut panelling and full, too, of an expansive hospitality.

But when we sat down at a huge round table, they began to make earnest apologies:

"You are in bad luck here," they said, "You have not met the right people yet. We're just a frivolous crowd. You ought to meet some of our serious people."

"Good Lord," I said, "I don't look that grim, do I? I don't act like a wet blanket, do I?"

Oh, no, they said. Not that. But it was a pity for me to get a wrong impression of Minneapolis. There were so many really worth-while people. One of the big milling men, for example, had the greatest collection of jade in the world. People came from all over Europe to look at it and marvel. And there was a writers' club, with a lot of interesting members.

I tried to explain that I was quite happy, that I wasn't searching for any particular sort of person. But they continued to fear that I would get a wrong impression of their town.

The woman at my right was especially grieved. "You'll go away," she said, "and think that all Minneapolis does nothing but drink too many old-fashioned cocktails in the middle of the day and talk like Babbitts."

And that gave me, as it were, the key to their distress. Minneapolis is very sensitive about the Babbitt legend. The very word makes them glance up with a sharp self-consciousness and begin to make shy protest. They have taken Mr. Lewis's novel quite painfully to themselves, and it is a little touching to observe them as they strive to show that the accusation is no longer true, that they are not really Babbitts at all.

I asked the woman at my right to tell me something about herself — how she lived —

"George and I did a funny sort of thing," she said. George was her husband. "We were married about eight years ago, and he had a nice business. I mean, he had a grand business, and he made right much money. But we got tired of it. And two years ago I made him quit the business. We're retired, my dear. Think of it! And at our age, too!" She laughed.

"We went down on the river, and bought some land and put up a little house. And now we raise a lot of horses and Scotty terriers and things like that. We never make any money at it, but it always seems as if we will next year. Still, we don't stay home much. We always take a trip somewhere, six months of the year. California, or Switzerland, or somewhere like that."

I said, "It seems a marvelous way to live."

"And culture!" she said — laughing again with that mockery of herself and her attainments which is so commonly encountered in Americans. "We have culture!"

"Go on," I said.

"We etch," she said. "George and I etch. We bought a press about two months ago — George and I both thought we were pretty good at line drawings, and decided to go in for etchings."

"Are they any good?" I asked.

"Looka," she said. And we went over to the wall of the room where a print was hanging. It was a lovely, fragile dry point, a willow tree brooding over a small, low house.

"You know, that's good," I said.

"Oh, go on with you," she said. "We're just a lot of Babbitts out here in these wilds. Just Philistines. Anybody could tell you that."

I said, "I'm getting around to the point where I don't believe half those things that anybody can tell you."

She said, "It *is* a kind of cult, isn't it — making fun of America, making fun of us in particular, out here in the wide open spaces?"

I agreed to that, and she said, "What do you really think? Any hope for us?"

I said, "I haven't any idea what you mean. You live comfortably. You have all the varieties of experience. You are not slaves to routine or any sort of conventions. And as for that culture we keep talking about, you certainly have a very deep feeling for beauty. I haven't met anybody yet out here who was lacking in that. You buy more books than anybody else in the world, and you seem to read them. As far as I can make out, your chief ailment is a pretty foolish self-consciousness. I'll admit you are between the devil and the deep blue sea in one respect: they call you Philistines one moment, and then the next, when a little of your interest in art is revealed, they laugh and call you culture-struck. But I don't see why any of that should really disturb you. You suffer from too much writing — every mortal that can lift a pen has to make his comment upon you — reflections upon the American scene, you know. And I suppose, in the end, such a deluge of words would make a stone image self-conscious. But there's really no point in being so sensitive about these things written in print. You should not be stampeded just because people keep on making cartoons of you."

"Maybe we'll fool 'em yet," she said.

· 5 ·

In St. Louis, I went to church. It was an Episcopal church, and the rector had gained much fame in the region for his force, his liberality, and his ability to attract large congregations. That morning the church was almost full. I will confess that it was my first attendance upon a religious ceremony in a great many years, and I was a little astonished at the peaceful splendor of the ritual: the flames of the candles burning with steady glow, the boys in white surplices chanting their treble song against the groined arch of the nave, the slow procession and the soothing eloquence of formal prayers. I looked at the faces about me, and they were very quiet. They were not rapt with the fervor of belief. It seemed, on the other hand, as if they found themselves, suddenly, in a still pool of existence, as if they were grateful for a moment's surcease from the hard drive of affairs.

The rector, when he delivered his sermon, spoke in easy and friendly tones. The eloquence of booming phrases and sonorous periods was not his way. His rhetoric was straightforward and lacked altogether the gilded flourish which I remembered so clearly from the sermons of my childhood.

On the other hand, somewhat to my astonishment, he did not talk about religion except in the most vaguely inferential terms. He took for his text some veiled phrase out of the Old Testament, and the burden of his message to his hearers was that they should meet their financial difficulties with a sure courage. He talked about world trade and how it might be made a more amiable and

surely profitable business if men would but deal honestly with each other. He urged his listeners to have confidence in the country and in themselves, nor to lose heart when the way was rocky. He dwelt, in the body of his sermon, upon fair dealing and kept promises, the ultimate bondage of honest words, as the backbone of commerce.

I was so much struck with the attitude which he assumed that I went to call on him a little later in the day. He received me in a shadowy room, full of books, and seeing him thus closely, it was more apparent than ever that he was a rational man, full of vitality, without the least trace of the zealot in his spirit.

I said to him, "Will you be amiable enough to give me an outline of your creed? Will you tell me the basic theme of your teaching — which these people seem to take so eagerly?"

He leaned back. The smoke from his cigar gave off a fine aroma. The dim light made the room a restful place, and it was very quiet.

"I try to make them see," he said after a while, "that they can serve God best by dealing fairly and honorably with each other. I tell them to give over their petty vanities and their opportunities to take mean advantage of each other. I try to enlarge the dignity of the individual, to make him respect himself and his fellow men, and to grace life with nobilities which spring from a generous and kind heart."

I said, "You don't preach the more rigorous terms of salvation?"

He said, "I am not an evangelist."

I said, "Your sermon to-day, Doctor, seemed to me to offer a system of ethics, a system of moral conduct for

man on the earth, rather than a system of redemption for the immortal soul."

"I think," he said, "that our immediate duty, as ministers of God, is to make humanity set its temporal house in order. I don't see how we can get very far with the spirit if the mind is warped by smallness, and oblique morals, and petty aims."

I said, "The old-time religion used to teach us that all worldly aims were petty, even the expansion of world trade and the running of republics. It used to teach us that nothing counted except the worship of God and the attempt to please Him. I suppose that sort of teaching is out of date now."

"Yes," he said. He drew a slow mouthful of smoke from his cigar. "The older men were very vigorous. They preached with a lot of fire and they were devoted to the cure of souls — after their own lights. But they overlooked some very simple facts, the facts of everyday living. Nowadays, it is a little foolish to deny that worldly affairs — the expansion of trade and the operation of republics, as you say — are very important things. I have preached that if we do these tasks honorably and well, with a proper regard for the rights of our fellows and a respect for their dignity as human beings, we can very well let the soul take care of itself."

I said, "Do you think many of your brothers in the cloth feel that way?"

"A very great many," he said. "It is the new religion, which all really rational men are following."

I said, "Do you think the power of the Protestant church — over men's minds, I mean — is growing or waning?"

He said, "It is growing very rapidly."

I said, "This sounds terribly irrelevant, but do you play any games, indulge in any sports?"

He smiled. "Not so very irrelevant," he said. "I see what you mean. Yes, I get a great deal of pleasure out of golf, and I can still beat my oldest boy at tennis. You are perfectly right. I would like to see the whole world accept the code of sportsmanship and fair play that we find on the athletic field. It would make the world a more decent place in which to live. If we could accomplish that, then it would be time enough indeed to think about the deep mysteries of the beyond."

I said, "To tell you the truth, that doesn't seem to have a thing to do with Christianity." He smiled slowly and waited for me to go on. "The Christianity of self-abnegation, or humility, of surrender to the infinite that Jesus himself happened to teach," I said. "You are teaching a code of behavior in the affairs of the world. I could follow you explicitly, and practice everything that you urge me to practice, and yet not believe in any sort of God at all."

He said, "I am not a mystic, if that is what you mean."

I said, "If you will forgive my utter rudeness, I think this is the reason for the decay of the church." I paused and he waved me to go on, still smiling with fine good nature. I said, "Your congregation this morning, for example. They certainly could not help but recognize the truth of every word you said. It was utterly simple and obviously right. But do you think these people have any hunger for a rarer food? Do you think they need any assurance that all is well in some world far removed from the world of stocks and bonds, of buying prices and selling prices?

Do you think their souls have any need at all for a more ethereal sustenance?"

"Again I must say," he smiled, "that I leave all such matters in the hands of the mystics. I must talk to my people in terms that they can understand, the terms of their everyday lives. I think that they, themselves, answer your questions. For they come to the church, do they not? They support it and give their approval to it."

Thereafter, I visited many churches and talked to many preachers, of many faiths, in most of the cities of America. But I ask the privilege of deferring my report upon these matters until a later chapter of this book.

Still in St. Louis, I happened upon an old acquaintance. I had known him in two or three newspaper offices but he was a press agent now — a press agent for some aviation concern — and I came upon him alone in his hotel room. staring glumly at a half-empty bottle of whisky.

I said, "You look pretty blue."

He nodded. "Yes. I'm blue, all right. I've just had a blow."

"Financial?" I asked, knowing something of his past.

"Spiritual," he said, with a faint downward twisting at the corners of his mouth to reflect the mockery which he perpetually bestowed upon himself. He poured a large drink and said, "The newspaper business has gone to pot."

I said, "All right. I'll listen."

He said, "I came into this town yesterday, to get in some advance work for the air show. I hadn't been in the room ten minutes before I had a visitor. He was from one of the papers here. . . ."

My friend told me which paper.

"He told me that his shop was going pretty big for the air show — a lot of local interest in aviation and so on. They were getting out a special supplement, big picture spreads and stories about all the ships. He wanted to know if I had any material, and I dug into my bag.

"It was pretty good stuff. Nothing raw about it. I gave my company a break here and there, of course, but the stories were interesting for their own sake. I had some swell pictures for him too. A lot of action stuff.

"Well, he looked over the stories, and said they would go mighty fine, said his readers would just eat up yarns like that. Then he sprang it on me." My friend took another drink. It was apparent that he was quite honestly upset. "He said to me, this bird, 'Now we want to do something special for your company, because after all it is the biggest in the business. We want to give you a full page, all to yourself. You can print any kind of story you want in it. And we'll give you another full page of pictures in the Sunday rotogravure. How does that suit you?' Well, I told him it suited me something gorgeous. Then he went on, 'Of course, you ought to give us a break too. You could take a full page ad, couldn't you? Cost about fifteen hundred dollars, and you'd really get three full pages of publicity out of it."

My friend looked at me. "You understand," he said, "I'm not sentimental about the newspaper business." I nodded. "But," he said, "I still can't get used to being propositioned like that. Just a straight sell-out of your news columns that way. So I told this egg I wouldn't be interested. What was his answer? You'll never guess, sweetheart. He said, 'We could give you an editorial too — you know, saying all that your company had accom-

plished for the advancement of aviation, and how the country ought to be proud of corporations like that — ' Yes, sir. That was the bargain."

He stopped talking and sat silent until I spoke again. "What did you do?" I asked.

"I'm terribly afraid," he said, "that I threw the gentleman a little too hard against that wall across the corridor."

I said, "I don't think I remember one quite that raw."

He said, very harshly, "You never heard me spout about the honor of the press. I don't get romantic over the noble profession of journalism. But I guess I'm pretty well satisfied to be out of the newspaper business if it's going to be that way. By God, they'd sell you column one, page one, to fill up with guff about how swell your airplanes are, if you'd grease their pockets with enough jack."

· 6 ·

At the Katy roundhouse, in Kansas City, they had the huge Mallet that was to take Number Four out to Texarkana ready and waiting. The oil burners were roaring in the fire box, and there was a hissing and clanking of steam that seemed like some gigantic breathing. The immense mechanism was an utterly fascinating thing, and the men who worked about it, thrusting long-spouted oil cans into crevices and checking its mammoth valves, seemed like odd little midgets fluttering about a monster. The illumination came from torch flares. It was dark red and streaked with smoky shadows.

The hostlers yelled at each other. The fireman tried the air pressure in the blowers, with the brilliant glare

from the fire box shining upon his tense face. The engineer strolled out of the shadows and gazed up at his machine. He was a big, solid man. There was a profound dignity in his round, expressionless face, and his clothing of striped overalls seemed to give an immeasurable certainty to his figure and all its movements. He was a little past sixty and his hair was white under a close-fitting cap with a long peak. The oilers and inspectors who moved past him spoke with forthright respect and appeared to cherish his brief, impersonal nod.

When he saw that I would like to talk to him, he beckoned, and we moved down the track a way to escape the drumming noise of the engine. We sat down on a low pile of cross-ties.

I said, "You've got the most fascinating job in the world."

"Yes," he said, "I know it."

I said, "How long have you been at it?"

"Railroading, you mean? Forty-seven years. I was call boy on the old Burlington when I was fifteen."

He had two grown sons, he said. One of them had gone to work in the freight yards at Omaha when he was eighteen, and now he was freight-train conductor, married and doing mighty fine. "The other one," he said, "wanted an education. He went to college. Railroading wasn't good enough for him. He learned a lot, but he can't seem to hold a job anywhere."

I said, "What do you do on your lay-over at home?"

"In season," he said, "I raise flowers. I've got the finest flower garden in western Missouri. Over two hundred varieties this year."

"Out of season?" I asked.

"I belong to a couple of lodges," he said. "I'm pretty active in them."

"Do you read any books?" I asked him.

"I belong to this book-a-month club," he said. "They send you some pretty good stuff. But the best book I've read in a long time is this one, "The Universe Around Us." You see, I get plenty of chance to look at stars on a night run like mine. It's pretty good to know a little something about 'em."

I said, "It sounds like a ridiculous question, I know. But you've lived a right long time. Are you satisfied with the life you've had? The life you're having now?"

"Well," he said, "I look at it this way. Any time a man gets really satisfied with himself and the way he is living, you want to look out. He's either getting old, or he is in a rut. No. You always want to keep making it better."

I interrupted him, "What do you mean — better?"

He thought for several moments. Even above the distant grunt and hiss of the locomotive, I could hear the ticking of the big gold watch in his pocket.

"You want your people to be happy," he said. "You want them to get all there is out of life, and you want to get it yourself, too."

I said, "I've heard a lot of people say that — getting all there is out of life — but I don't understand what it means. What do you mean by it?"

He said, "Well, let's see. You want to do your job right, and like your job, and get some satisfaction out of it. That's one thing, isn't it? Then you want to have a good comfortable home to live in. That's another thing. You want to treat people decently, so they will have some respect for you. And you want to keep your mind occupied,

keep improving your mind. You want to get some fun. I get my fun out of that garden of mine; other people might get it out of playing cards, or fooling with radio, or going to moving pictures. I suppose I mean this — I want to go to sleep a little tired every night, with a good day behind me and maybe a book to learn something out of before I go to sleep. And then, wake up in the morning feeling ready for another day just like it. That's getting something out of life, according to my ideas."

I said, "What do you think of the country?"

He said, "Well, I guess it's the greatest country in the world, all right. Don't seem to be much argument about that."

I said, "But do *you* like it? Do you like the kind of country we have?"

"Well," he said, "I suppose there's a lot of things I would change if I could have everything my way. But that could never be, and maybe I wouldn't know how to improve it anyhow. The main thing I'd like to see would be a leader, a real leader with some ideas that you could believe in. It would be great to get behind a man like that and help him put his ideas over. I mean a man like Lincoln or Woodrow Wilson — a real statesman that could show us which way to go."

He looked at his big watch and stood up.

"Down the line for me, now," he said.

We walked down the track. The locomotive, gleaming black in the light of the flares, seemed more wakeful for all the stillness of its wheels. A long plume of steam rose from its safety valve, and there was more noise from the oil blowers and from the exhaust. The engineer shook hands gravely. He climbed slowly up the ladder to the

cab, high above, and leaned out of the window. He, too, now seemed small and inconsequential in relation to the machine.

He pulled his goggles over his eyes. His hand went forward and came back slowly. There was the "phut" of a closing valve, and the tall wheels began to roll. All about, men stood at respectful attention while the engine slipped away over the tracks, its headlight sending a hard, white beam into the cluttered darkness.

· 7 ·

I spent several days in Kansas City, but I did not learn very much. I found some pleasant companions and some dull ones, but nothing that they said or did identified them particularly with the place in which they lived.

But I have said before that cities are not the prairie. Cities are not the Middle West. The heart of that country lies in the endless fields, dotted here and there with white houses. I gather, too vaguely no doubt, that slow changes are going forward in that land. The scheme of the farmer's life, because of his children's education and the little experiments in communism and the industrialism of agriculture and the slow loss of a feel for rustic simplicity, is being altered. The current has not set at all, and it is still flowing haphazardly. That is because no focus exists upon which men's thoughts may be crystallized. There are no great men. There are no great dreams. There are no great ideals. When such things come, with their familiar unexpectedness, out of the earth itself, I have the growing notion that the people will be ready.

IV

The Frontier

THE eastern edge of the frontier is a tortuous line that weaves down the continent, begins at Deadwood among the Black Hills of the Dakota country, passes through Cheyenne and Denver and Santa Fe, and diffuses itself among the low benches of the Rio Grande. Pass across that line at any point and you are in a land where humanity still is embattled with the forces of a particularly indifferent Nature. You are in a vast disputed corner of the earth, where the ironies of the dark mother are always crude, her retribution upon the cocksure and the vain a little terrifying.

The cities I have named are not, you understand, themselves of the frontier. They are its threshold, and from them you stare at the high mountain barrier or the plain that bears resemblance to an immense sea, frozen at the height of a tempest. As Denver:

You look at the mountains from Denver. You stand in the broad, level streets, lined with low buildings, and

at the end of every street some pinnacle juts upward toward the sky. And you meet people who still belong, most of them, to the prairies.

I learned, somewhat to my surprise, that Denver is no longer a mining town. I had remembered the brawling discoveries of gold and silver along its fringes, the legends that hang about Cripple Creek and the Colorado River bed and Brown's Palace Hotel. There came to mind the tales of a tough town, a mile up from the level of the sea, and I suppose I was a trifle disappointed to find out that the legends and the tales are now the fading romantic aura of a half-forgotten past. I suppose I was disappointed to learn that Denver lives by so prosaic a thing as the sugar beet. But that is true. The famous old mines are paid out, and the fields are thick with stolid farmers where once the hard-pan boys toiled out their hopeful days. But they make more money out of sugar beets now than they ever made in the best year of the mining.

I met a poet. He is an extremely good poet and, if the point is of any importance, a successful one. I met him by design, but it was by accident that I learned of his poetry — that I identified him as the man whose verses I had read with extraordinary pleasure. For he earns his keep, and his automobile, and his radio, not by poetry but by his job in the office of a large sugar manufacturer, and he came to tell me of the marvels of that manufacturer's process. Together, we went out to the mill. We looked at a pile of sugar beets, two or three million pounds of them. We strolled among the boiling vats and looked at the grinders and saw the white sugar come pouring out of a spout like hard frozen snow, while he gave eager explanations. It was difficult to conceive of any man more

utterly absorbed in any matter than he was in this business of making sugar.

But then, on the way back to the hotel, we got to talking of himself: the sort of life he led, why he lived in Denver, what he thought about the various confusions — and the fact of his poetry emerged at last. I do not mean that he was shy about it. Rather, it simply had not occurred to him that anybody would be interested. Thereafter, he was an extraordinarily different fellow. His preoccupation with the sugar industry fell from him like a discarded garment. He was no longer the man who had said, with the utmost gravity, "This sugar that you see is really a blending of Colorado spring water and Colorado sunshine, mixed in the perfect proportions . . ." He was now, as if some grubby enchantment had been lifted from his spirit; he had become a sensitive and thoughtful human being.

". . . and I was thinking last night," he said (you had the impression that his thinking of last night was a surreptitious thing, stolen a little guiltily from the sugar business), "I was thinking last night that there is a definite reason for the dismal lack of creative production in this part of the world. You never heard of a considerable novelist, or painter, or musician coming from these precincts, did you? Well — " he pointed toward the great peaks flung against the western horizon, "I think that may be an answer to it. Melodrama. The whole thing, mountain and mesa, canyon and pouring river, is one immense damn' symphony with brasses and cymbals; and lyric verses and divine landscapes and swashbuckling three-acters fill the intermissions. Those things are satisfying. They feed the instinctive hunger. You don't find any poignant yearn-

ing after beauty or adventure or release from a commonplace world among our folks. They get those things every time they glance toward the west. They don't have to imagine them and translate them into reality by the use of art. They live in the very midst of art — at least, art of a sort.

"And if they wanted to sit down and write, or paint, or make music, they would be defeated before they struck the first tap. They would know that they could not make up anything to match the world around them."

He broke off suddenly and looked at me. "Are you," he asked, "going to write anything about the Grand Canyon?"

I said, "No. I'm not that presumptuous, and I am not eager to make myself ridiculous. Who could write anything but nonsense about such a thing?"

"You see my point, then," he answered. "And I will carry it a little further. I have a friend, a young man, who has an extraordinary talent for working in mediums like the woodcut — heavy, bold things. He was born here in the mountains. Four or five years ago, he told me he had a mania about Long's Peak. You can see Long's Peak yonder, that tremendous mass just to the right of the little gap. So he went out to the peak. Said he wanted to live on the side of the mountain itself, get the feel of it, try to transmute that feel into some sort of picture. He built a little shack and spent a year there. He spent a year with that mountain on his back, dominating his mind. And he came back looking like a ghost. He was defeated. He had hundreds of sketches, a hundred or more finished pictures. He asked me to come to see him, and

while I was there he tore them all up. He said, 'It's perfectly ridiculous trying to make a little picture out of that mountain.'

"I told him to leave the region altogether. Go to some flat place and begin pining after his hills. Perhaps, I suggested, that would help. He left two or three months ago for Kansas. Found a little hut right in the middle of that flat table. I haven't heard from him since."

I said, "And this country made romantic heroes out of a different kind of man."

"Just so," he said. "It followed naturally that the adventurous fellows would turn out to be the most amazing blood-and-thunderers in the world. They simply tried to match their environment. Wild Bill Hickok and Billy the Kid, all the killers. They had to make some decent effort to fit into the scenery."

"What," I asked, "is the destiny of such a place? What will it become?"

"It has no destiny," he said. "It will not become anything. There it is; look at it. Go into it, and look at it, and see for yourself that it will never change. So few people can live in it. Men make such little difference to it."

· 2 ·

On my way into the mountains, for I followed the poet's advice, I stopped a little while at Cheyenne in Wyoming. And Cheyenne, like Denver, has changed all of its old ways in late years. It is not a cattle town any more. They hold the annual round-up there, and cowboys come from the plains to the west and compete for

prizes. But Cheyenne, too, lives by sugar beets — by its railroad yards, and, to a small extent, by the airport that lies at its edge.

The transcontinental mails pass through the airport. And ships that feed the main trunk line from all that region make their juncture with it under the shadow of the old cow town.

I went out to the airport one evening. The flood lights were on, because the Eastern mail was due in presently, and two or three ships stood on the apron in front of the main hangar. One of them was recognizable as a mail plane, long, and heavy, and broad of wing. Two mechanics were working on it, preparing to start its engine, and a tall, drooping man stood watching them. I learned that he was the pilot who would take the mail when it came from the East, and fly it across the dark mountains toward the Pacific. With the exception of two men, he had spent more hours in the air than any other pilot in the world.

As I watched him, he seemed remote and unapproachable. His mind, and even his person, seemed to occupy some atmosphere of its own. He saw every movement made by the fingers of the mechanics, and they were conscious of his watching. And every little while he turned his head slowly to listen for the drone of the ship out of the gloomy east.

It was, therefore, faintly surprising to discover that he was an amiable fellow, that he abhorred the romantic attitude toward the simple business of jerking the mail across the hills, that he had no more pride in his job than a taxi driver.

I said, "Good weather to-night."

"Mighty pretty," he said. His voice was a flat drawl,

with a faint suggestion of humor in every syllable. "But, boy, she was sure tough last night."

"Rain?" I asked.

"Snow," he said. "Big flurry over the Yellowstone, and powerful cold. I got up around eighteen thousand feet and flew her blind for an hour. No, sir, I didn't have no good time last night."

"Ever have to bail out on this run?"

"Once," he said. I was thinking of his white 'chute, slipping down out of the darkness into those hidden valleys, into the great tumbled mountains and the black emptiness of the earth, but the question seemed to fill him with chagrin. He turned to the mechanics. "How about winding her up?" he asked them. "Joe will be in any time now." They got out the crank and the air vibrated with the low whine of the inertia starter.

I said, "Was it bad?"

"Oh, that jump?" he said. "Bad enough. You hate to throw away a ship like that. It was a mighty pretty ship. Picked up ice on the controls and had to step over. Throwing away a twenty-thousand-dollar airplane like that gets you."

"How long do you lay over here, on the run?" I asked.

"Twenty-four hours, generally. We've got a lot of pilots."

"Got a home here?"

He laughed quietly. "Boy," he said, "I'm figuring on getting me a home. You bet! Maybe you didn't know I was getting married next week?"

I congratulated him.

"Yes, sir. I'll have me a home. Got it picked out. On your way back in town you look at that little white two-

story house about half a mile beyond the Standard filling station on the left. That's her. The one with a big porch going all the way 'round."

The engine turned over with a savage jerk. There was a flash of fire, a sudden roar, and the blast from the propellor was tearing at our clothing. We moved away, strolling slowly down the edge of the field and looking out over the square mile of brightly illuminated turf, upon which the darkness seemed to crowd like a palpable thing.

"In the war?" I asked.

"Some," he said.

"Get across?"

"Yeah. I got across."

"What outfit?"

"I was with the English. R.A.F."

"You must have gone early."

"Oh, about nine-fifteen. Somewhere in there."

"You had luck," I began, but he interrupted me. "I've forgotten all about them days," he said.

I said, "Ever do anything but fly — nowadays, I mean?"

"That's all," he said. "Just fly. Ain't that enough? Of course — " he smiled to himself, "of course, I been doing a little something else these last four months."

I said, "Pretty, I'll bet."

"Pretty as a picture," he said. "Yes, sir, and a judge's daughter too. I had a tough time with the old man. Took a lot of persuading to make him believe I wasn't one of these damn fool grand-stand players. He thinks every pilot spends all his time wondering how he can finance a flight across some ocean. I told him I didn't care none

about being famous. But hard to convince, hard to convince."

"Does she get scared?" I asked. "When you're away, I mean?"

"Listen," he said, "I ain't got no time for white livers, male or female."

He suddenly stopped walking and cocked his ear to the sky. "There comes Joe," he said. And soon I too made out the faint whir of an approaching ship. We walked leisurely back to the hangar and watched Joe come in. He dropped out of the darkness, very low to the ground, and rolled up to a dead stop just at the edge of the apron. While he was getting out, men were fumbling at the straps on the mail compartment of his ship, and presently the heavy sacks came out. They were carried over to the other mail plane and loaded with great care.

The pilot quite forgot my presence. He climbed into a heavy, fur-lined monkey suit that was spotted with grease, and they helped him harness on the flopping 'chute pack. He lit a cigar with great care, struggled until his unwieldy bulk was comfortable in the tight cockpit, and opened up the throttle. He did not wave his hand. He swung the ship about, ran swiftly down the field, and leaped into the black velvet that hung so heavily upon the field. We heard him circle once and saw the long blue plume of his exhaust. Then the sound of his engine died slowly away.

The operations manager came up. I said, "What did he do in the war?" The operations manager smiled. "He worked his way across when he was eighteen and joined up with the English. Every man in his squadron was an ace. He had fourteen to his credit."

I said, "What kind of fellow is he?"

The operations manager grinned. "That girl of his will be lucky if he don't forget all about her in a month. He can't think about anything but flying. He's restless whenever he is on the ground, like a prairie hen that's had her wings cut."

· 3 ·

From Cheyenne, the way leads across an incredible stretch of earth, vast and lonely and beautiful. Now and then you see a man. Now and then a house hugs close against the ground in the shelter of a few trees. But that is an empty world. And driving along its slowly curving roads you are led to remember, as if it were somehow a surprising thing, that this too is America, that this interminable land is one with the smoky cities and the elegant drawing-rooms, the New York Giants, and stinking slums, and Congress, and radical agitators in Union Square. In that, there is a profound incongruity, for some odd purity hovers over the plains. And you know, at last, why it seems so utterly absurd to the people of the plains for us to talk such a deal about our foreign relations, our involvement with the confused affairs of a confused world. For it is simple there. The complexities do not encroach. Europe is a far-off dream and the conflicts of the races a lost reverberation in the free wind.

Now and again, I saw a man bent down in front of a tiny shelter tent, tending a fire. A horse drooped at his elbow. Cattle dotted the earth. It would have been pleasant to approach these men and talk with them. But for reasons that I cannot explain, that was not possible. It would have seemed brash.

So I drove until I came to a little town called Bozeman, in Montana. A disconsolate colonel in the Union Army founded Bozeman, unable to go back to the commonplace days of his Pennsylvania home after Appomattox, hauling the men of his command after him into a fresh world. And now Bozeman is a slumbering settlement of stores and banks, doctors and lawyers and preachers, who tend the needs of the cattlemen. I met a lawyer with an Irish name, a tall and silent fellow whose desk was a mess of tangled and forgotten papers, whose windows looked down on a wide street.

We talked for a little while, and he said "Let's get a Coca-Cola." So we went down to a big room on the ground floor, a room that was a combination of many things, including a soda fountain. Beyond the soda fountain there were a few pool tables, with men playing. And between the pool tables three games of cards were going. We strolled to look over the shoulders of the players.

They were rough-looking fellows as far as clothing went. Dungarees and woolly coats, heavy boots and broad-brimmed hats. Some were young and some were old, and all were utterly intent upon their game. They were playing poker. They played silently, a brief chuckle now and then, a brief grunt of disappointment. The cards were not new. The chips, white and red and blue, were worn and battered. While we watched, an old fellow with a gray beard pushed his hat back, stood up, greeted my lawyer friend, and agreed to drink a Coca-Cola with us.

I said to him, at the fountain, "Would you mind telling me what the chips are worth in that game?"

"The white ones are five dollars," he said. "The reds are twenty-five, and the blues a hundred."

We went back to the table and I counted the value of the stacks that were in sight before the players. Just a few dollars under ten thousand.

"Is it real money?" I asked the lawyer. "Do they pay?"

"Welchers wouldn't last long," he said. "Do you see that fellow?" He pointed, and I saw a youth leaning back in a chair against the wall, all alone. He was twenty-four or twenty-five. He had an extraordinarily handsome face, lean and dark, with a quantity of black hair. His eyes were closed, as if he were dozing, and a huge black hat lay across his knees. "Well," said the lawyer, "he's had bad luck since the Fourth of July. Lost himself thirty thousand acres of grazing land and four thousand head of cattle. I'm trying to put through a loan for him that will give him another stake. He'll get the loan, I guess. Everybody likes him."

He told me that I should meet the Captain. "The Captain is the biggest man in these parts," he said. "He's what you might call the baron. Owns the Lazy D."

Luckily, the Captain had come into town from his ranch house. He had come to attend the funeral of a friend and was therefore dressed in his town clothes, but when we encountered him, he agreed to step up to the lawyer's office for a little while. When we had mounted the steps and found chairs, I looked at him more closely. He seemed about sixty. He was not large, but there was remarkable power in his hands and in the drooping set of his shoulders. His face was very brown, and his small eyes looked from beneath overhanging gray brows.

He turned to the lawyer and asked softly, "Is your young lady about the office?"

"No," said the lawyer.

"Good," said the Captain, and he turned to me with a slow smile. "I'm given to a pretty free use of profanity, but I don't like to offend the women folks. It always eases my mind to know that there ain't none of 'em about."

He struck a match to a cigar and looked at me with the faintest possible suggestion of condescension in his glance. "How old am I?" he asked. I said I thought he was about sixty. "Eighty-one years old next month," he said with enormous pride. "I knew I'd fool you. And I can still ride range with the best man in the county."

He began to answer my questions and to talk about himself. "I came into this town on a lame painted pony and twenty-two cents in my pocket on May the fifth, eighteen hundred and seventy-seven," he said. "To-day, me and my partner own outright half a million acres of the finest grazing land in the world, and we've got rights on another half million acres. I keep a herd that never get under thirty thousand head, and if it wasn't for this slump in the beef market, I could call myself rich. How's that?"

I told him it was fine.

"But," he went on, "the depression don't bother me. I can keep my cattle, not ship at all this year. And more than that, I'm buying all the cattle I can get my hands on. This is the time to buy, ain't it?

"I had a hard one last week, though. Heard about a rancher that had thirteen hundred head for sale about sixty miles down from the railroad, and so I went down to look at 'em. You know, the drouth hit 'em down there. Burnt up most of the range and dried up the water holes. This fellow's cattle showed it too. Pretty mangy looking.

He said he wanted five dollars a head for 'em, and that was a fair enough price, but then I began to figure with him on how I'd get 'em out of there. It turned out that we were more than fifty miles from the railroad, and no water holes, no grazing in between. So I just had to tell him I couldn't drive that herd out to the line. Half of 'em would have died. And I couldn't afford to truck water for 'em along the way.

"He sat there looking at me, and we had some grub that his wife made up, and then he said, 'Cap'n, did you bring any extra ammunition along with you?' I told him I thought that between me and Jack there was probably a couple of hundred rounds. He borrowed 'em.

"He went out the door, saying he would be back in a little while, and pretty soon we heard a mighty popping off of a gun down behind the hill. None of us said anything, just waited, until finally he came back and said he'd pay me for my ammunition soon as he could. I says to him, 'What was you shooting?' And he says, 'I couldn't sit here and look at them animals starving to death, could I?' "

The Captain leaned forward. "That was one way to lick the depression, eh? Fifteen hundred head shot down in two hours. 'Course he'd have to move out of there. Couldn't stand the stink. But he was gettin' ready to move, anyhow."

I asked him how many hands he had to have for his home range, to handle the thirty thousand head of his main herd. It astonished me a little when he said that he and three good riders could sure handle that herd all right.

"I've got good boys," he chuckled. "Made a trip all

the way down to Old Mexico for 'em last month. Or, partly for them, and partly for me. You know they have these rodeos all around the country, and there's some pretty good prize money. My boys always earn expenses. Sometimes a little more. Well, one day I come out on the porch of my ranch house, and there they were, the three of 'em, wrestlin' one of my best Hereford steers. I raised the devil, told 'em they might break the leg of a fifteen-dollar animal, and they said they had to have something to practice on. So I went down to Old Mexico and picked up a carload of longhorns for 'em."

I said, "Just offhand, that doesn't seem like such good economy."

"Oh," he said, "I can use the longhorns this summer all right. A lot of tourists and dudes come out to our place and you like to give 'em a little show. You like to put on a little excitement for 'em. I can let the boys use the longhorns then."

I said, "What do you think of the dudes?"

He said, "I'm working up a scheme to make some real money out of those fellows. I could handle eight or ten of 'em at the house. Make 'em work too, and make 'em pay a lot for staying there. Sure, dudes are all right, if you know how to use 'em."

He began spinning yarns of the old days. He had ridden range all over the cattle country. He had fought Indians and bad men. It was astonishing to observe how these fragments out of his life resembled so closely the lurid fiction of the old West, and I remarked upon it. But he could not join with me in that discussion, because he had never read any of the fiction.

"I guess maybe I spent most of my time living it," he

said. "Never got around to reading it none. We had some bloody days all right, and some hard ones."

But his reminiscences were cut short by the tolling of the funeral bell. He stood up, his small gray eyes very clear and hard. "I've got to go and help bury Jim now," he said. "I told him not to try to ride that kind of a horse at his age, but he would do it. And here he is, getting buried."

We watched him from the window as he walked down the street. In every stride, his consciousness of the power he held, the money he had won from cattle, was perfectly apparent. It was plain that he gained a deep satisfaction from the polite and deferential bows that he received. He did not hurry. He knew they would not proceed with the funeral until the great man had arrived.

The lawyer said, "Now, you ought to go up the canyon. You ought to get back into the mountains, away from these towns. There are a hundred canyons, any one of them just like the rest. But I know a fellow that's going up one of 'em to-morrow to hunt deer. He can guide you, if you want to go."

So we went up the canyon. We drove along a narrow road, with the river plunging blue and white at our side, a few feet down. The walls that closed in against us to the right and to the left were steep and they were black with pines. Now and then we rounded a turn to come upon the face of a mountain that had been shorn of its pines by the wearing stream or by some ancient cataclysm, and there the cliff was purple and red, chrome yellow and copper green. Or, again, the view opened for a moment and we saw a far-off peak floating in the sky, all white with snow that gleamed in the sunshine.

We had left the town and the railroad a very great many miles behind. We had left the bench lands where the red cattle were grazing, and it had been a long time since we passed a cabin.

Just as the quick darkness was falling, we reached our destination. It was a place called Borst's, and Borst's was five low buildings in a line on the edge of the river, a little way back from the road. Old Man Borst had built it a good many years ago, to give lodging to the elk hunters who always find their way up the canyon in the shooting season. The man who was with me said, as we got out of the car, "Here comes Ben." And Ben stepped down from the shallow porch to greet us.

He was not a large man. He was about thirty. He wore a tall black sombrero made out of very heavy felt, and a black leather jacket, and dark corduroy trousers, and heavy leather boots. He grinned when he spoke to us and his voice was singularly mild and diffident. "Glad to see you," he said. "You bet! You're just in time for supper."

He led us to the low room where we were to sleep and helped us with our luggage. In the lamplight his face was plainly visible for the first time, and it was remarkable for the extraordinary clarity of his blue eyes. They were mild and diffident like his voice, but they seemed capable of seeing things that ordinary eyes would never see at all. He stirred about, getting the fire going and bringing the water for our pitcher, and it was pleasant to watch the strength in the slow, smooth cadence of his movements.

When he left us to let the kitchen know there were guests for supper, I asked my companion to tell me who he was.

"Oh, he was born here in the canyon. Worked three or

four years down in the Big Hole country, breaking horses and riding range. Went off to some camp in the war, and when that was done he went to Boston and studied singing. He sings pretty well. But he was in love with old man Borst's daughter. He came back here and married her, and then the old man died, and they inherited this ranch."

On the way down to the cook house, we stopped for a moment at Henry's door, and he made us come in. Henry was about seventy-five, some kin or another of old man Borst's. He gave us a drink of his own distillate, out of a ginger-ale bottle, and told us we could look at the museum. That was an old glass candy case full of musty trinkets, bones and pistols and knives and rusted spurs, but Henry called our particular attention to two tortoise-shell hair-pins set with faded brilliants, to a pair of frayed garters made out of pink silk.

"Those items," he said, "was once presented by me to Calamity Jane. I guess you've heard of her. She belonged to me for a while before Bill Hickok came along. When she left me for him, she gave them back, just to show there was no ill feeling. But, drink up, gentlemen. There ain't nothing else for a man to do these days."

At the cook house, Ben introduced us to Elizabeth, his wife. She had ashy blonde hair and a curious shy smile that changed her whole face and touched it with beauty. Her hands were very strong. She was a little flushed from working at the stove with the cook — a talkative woman in a black cotton dress. Elizabeth told us to sit down at the long table, and she began passing dishes to us. We had begun to eat when a tremendous buck of a man came in, very young, with a loud ringing voice. While he was wash-

ing his face and hands at the sink, my companion told me who he was.

"That's Jake," he said. "He wrangles the horses. Came here from Danbury, Connecticut, about six years ago, and he is still a fancier cowboy than any native of these parts. It takes somebody from the East to be a real buckaroo." Ben laughed and said, "He's like a cowboy in the stories." From that time until I left, Ben never glanced in Jake's direction without hiding a secret access of laughter.

Jake sat down and piled the meat heavy on his plate and talked about a horse he had been breaking to the saddle that day. Another man came in. Everybody said, "Hello, Luke," and Luke nodded to them. He, too, was very young, and he was in almost absurd contrast to Jake. He was silent to the point of dourness, and once he had filled his plate, bent over it, and did not lift his head for a very long time. Elizabeth did not sit down with us. She kept passing the steak and the hot biscuits.

My companion and Ben were talking about an adventure of the previous year. A pack horse, going up the trail to Windy, had been frightened by some animal and bolted. She had jarred her pack loose and an ax had tumbled down, its blade precisely severing an artery in her knee.

"Will you ever forget that?" asked Ben. She just lay there on the ground, with the blood pumping out and looking at me like she was saying, 'Do something to stop that. Do something to stop that blood.' I never worked over a horse so hard in my life. Took nearly two hours to tie a string around that cut artery. . . ."

Jake said, "Hey, look at Luke."

We looked at him and he was turned away from his food, leaning over the back of his chair, very white.

"Makes me sick at the stomach," he said, "to hear you talk about that horse. Bleeding like that."

In a little while he said he felt better. He went on with his supper, but long before we were done he got up and walked out.

Jake said, "That is sure one funny boy. Remember last winter, when he was a forest ranger?" He turned to me. "A forest ranger," he said, "has to stay up in the mountains for two or three weeks at a time, keeping the trails open. All by himself. Then he can come down for a day or two to rest and talk to people and lay in supplies. Well, Luke had been away about ten days on one of his trips, when one morning I saw him riding down. He just rode up to the cook house here and got down off that gray horse of his. He came in and stood by the stove for a minute and I looked at him and he was crying. Tears running all down his face. He just stood there — it was snowing a blizzard — and never looked at anybody. Then he went out and got back on his horse and rode up the mountain and didn't come back for nearly three weeks. Never spoke a word."

Jake laughed tremendously.

Ben said, "He showed me his notebook one time. He keeps a notebook when he's up in the mountains. Puts down his impressions, he says. Writes poetry too."

I said, "Where is he from?"

Ben answered, "He and his brother came riding up the canyon five or six years ago. I think they were from somewhere in Wyoming, but I never asked. His brother got killed in a snowslide two or three years back."

After supper, we strolled back to our room, but stopped for a little while to listen to the yarns of an old lion hunter

who was gossiping with Henry. He is nearly as old as Henry, but he still spends most of his time ranging the hills and the canyons, killing lions and collecting the state bounty of fifty dollars a head. He told us, with tremendous gusto, of the time he captured a young lion, and broke it to buggy harness, and drove handsomely down the streets of Livingston.

"They arrested me," he said. The terrible indignity of that episode still made his eyes narrow as he told of it. "They arrested me, like a common criminal, and threw me into their stinking jail." He paused, and very quietly then, he said, "Since that occasion, gentlemen, I have considered myself an outlaw. I owe nothing to the State. It owes nothing to me. If the officers of the State run foul of me, I shall consider them game — nothing more nor less than game."

I had a very strong feeling that the slightest suggestion of laughter at that moment would have resulted in some dreadful happening. We all sat in perfect silence for nearly five minutes, unwilling to speak or move while he nursed his hatred born fifty years ago.

When the morning came, we rode up the trail to Windy Mountain on horses that were made of iron, and as we worked our slow way up the gulch, crossing tempestuous little streams and weaving our way through the measureless forest of pines, I learned small things about Ben. He used no profanity and virtually no slang in his speech, and he cared little for any sort of talk that went beyond simple statements of fact. He had never voted and cared nothing whatever for any sort of politics. He had never been in a church since he was ten years old. He had no sentimental feeling about horses; they were just useful

tools to his hand. He had tried to write a story once, but knew that it was worthless and tore it up without letting anybody read it. He had no taste for whisky.

Now and then he would pause on the way up the trail and point to some morsel of especial loveliness — the turn of a brook, the lift of a piney tunnel, the moving loneliness of a grass-grown vale. He would not say anything, just pull up his horse and sit there looking. But it was plain that the seemly contours of earth and water and trees were satisfying to him, that they fed well the ancient hunger for beauty and grace.

We stopped in a little glade for luncheon, and Ben lost a little of his shyness. He talked along at my urging, told how he got to be a sergeant of aviation in the war, and how his lack of education prevented him from learning to be a pilot. As he lounged on the earth at the roots of a tree and watched the horses gnawing bunch grass, his simplicity and his dignity were remindful of some older and more severe America. He was so little like the frontiersmen that the fiction people have made up. It would have been so absurd to think of calling him Canyon Ben, or the Gallatin Kid.

At noon, we were on the bald dome of Windy Mountain, staring at a miracle. You have seen the Alps — and oh, how very tame these Rocky Mountains make the Alps to seem. They are so stunning with their vastness, for you know that they are flung in an endless chain northward to the Arctic seas and southward to Cape Horn. They are so inestimably wild. And they are like mountains of the moon, forasmuch as their remoteness from the grubby fields and shops and mills of the world we know is an utter thing.

We stood at the edge of a precipice (moaning gales and sharp snow blown up from the crevices) and five thousand feet below us a yellow valley spread itself out to the sun. Beyond the valley loomed a wall with pinnacles like fangs, and those pinnacles were a hundred miles away. That was toward the east. Westward, the Butte range thrust its mass toward the sky. Dark colors that were purple mixed with red, cobalt blue shadowed with black, glowed and faded. And above all, in a hundred directions, the white snowcaps stood to the clouds with inexpressible loneliness.

It was a cleansing thing. The winds and the majesty of that rare place scoured past the shivering flesh and touched the spirit. Old, meager dreams trembled in their rags and died, and new, ineffable dreams flogged the mind to a boisterous enchantment. For a very long time we did not move. The horses were motionless as stone. The earth, in its grand beauty, seemed then a more important thing than a minor planet, spinning irrationally around the skirts of a minor star.

At last, with no word spoken, Ben swung about and we started down the trail.

That night we sat in Ben's cabin. It was not large. The river muttered just beyond the closed window and a colt was whinnying. Three of us sat around a wood stove, and Elizabeth leaned forward from the edge of the bed while we talked. (You could see her dresses hanging behind a little curtain in a corner cupboard that Ben had made, and at her hand on a table there were three or four novels — very good novels about fine, suave ladies and gentlemen in New York and London.)

Ben listened to our talk — the easy, boastful talk of my

companion and myself. It amused him in a secret way for men to jabber with such facile enthusiasms. And yet the intrusion of our extreme, if trivial, complexities upon the simple routine of his life seemed to disturb him. Even as we talked, it was possible to see the slow restlessness creep upon him: the eternal challenge of distant, gaudy places came up to haunt him, the eternal yearning of all men to be in the midst of noisy life, striving with the giants.

Hesitantly, he began to talk. "I've been sort of thinking," he said, "that I'd get out of the canyon myself pretty soon. It's been a long time since I was in those cities. Maybe it's a little too quiet for me up here.

"A fellow gets to thinking — you know — well, he's done pretty well in his own little back yard. I've got my quarter section over across the hill. Claimed it myself and settled it and built a good house on it. Built a sawmill too, and cut out a lot of logs and made up some right good lumber. While I was doing that, working at it, it seemed I was getting ahead mighty fast. But now it's done, it doesn't seem to amount to much."

I said, "What could amount to any more?"

"Well," he said, "you want to get out where the competition's a little keener. You get to thinking you're pretty good — I'm a fine one, to boast like that — but you get to thinking that maybe you're as good as the other fellow. And sometimes you just have to get out and see if that's right or if it isn't."

He said all of that most haltingly. In the canyon, it is not good manners for a man to talk about himself, to display his secret thoughts to the world. But we had given him such a very strong example.

Elizabeth sat motionless. She was leaning forward a

little more intently, but her face was almost without expression.

Ben went on. "It gets lonesome up here in the winter time. There isn't much work a fellow can do. You get to itching for a chance to try yourself at something new, something that really would get you somewhere. Maybe, before long, I'll just move out of here and go to a city."

There was an expression on Elizabeth's face now. And as Ben's shyness left him completely, as his quiet eagerness caught hold of him and his eyes began to shine with the desire for conquest, her expression grew more clear. She had never been out of the canyon. The world beyond — she knew it well from the novels — was a terrifying place. It was full of fine ladies with easy manners and fine gowns and supercilious eyes. . . .

"There was a fellow," Ben said, "who wanted me to come down to California next winter. Said there was plenty of opportunity there. It sort of worries you, you know, to hear talk like that and to think that maybe you're being a fool, maybe you're missing the big chance of your life. Do you think a fellow like me could make it, down there?"

Before I could answer, he turned to glance at Elizabeth. The look upon her face had deepened to show in every feature. She was defending with that look all that she had — all of her security, all of her possession of him. There was fear in her eyes: of strange people who would dispute that possession, against whose clever manners she would be quite helpless. Ben could not have failed to understand.

He laughed, a little wistfully but still with good grace. "Oh, well," he said, "Elizabeth wouldn't like it. She wouldn't be happy anywhere but in the canyon. I guess I ought to stay where I belong, anyhow."

We left them, quite sure that they would not waste a long, unhappy night talking about it. They were of the fashion of people who decide a thing with a glance, a word or two, and have done with it for good.

The next morning, a cold thin rain was sifting through the pines, and the mountain peaks were heavy with their burden of gray clouds. Ben helped us again with our luggage. Elizabeth put breakfast before us, and stood while we ate it, and all of us were in good spirits. While we were at the table, we heard the clump of a walking horse, and we looked out of the window. Luke went by. He was hunched against the rain in the high saddle of his gray horse, wearing a long white slicker and a leather helmet. He was going off for a fortnight of solitude along the remoter trails, and his eyes were fixed between the horse's ears. In the stooping curve of his figure, the hanging head of his horse, the slow pace as they moved past the window, there was something prophetic and curiously moving.

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From Vernal, in Utah, to the Great Salt Lake, the road leads through a country that is out of some wild dream. Far on the horizon the mountains lift their buttresses against all familiar worlds. Between the mountains and the road on every side the painted buttes are a sea of pyramids — pyramids with their points shorn cleanly off — and the earth is carpeted with sagebrush: gray sagebrush that smells sweet in the wind, and scrub willows that are all colors from pale yellow to smoky purple. It is that West you have imagined: brilliant and full of a forbidding strangeness.

In the finest and the strangest valley of all lies Salt Lake City, at the edge of the dead sea, in the bottom of a cup formed by the lavender mountains. And Salt Lake City, in very many ways indeed, is America's most striking city.

Here is the one community in the land whose past is an integral thing with the present. Its antiques, physically and mentally and spiritually, are not museum pieces but elements in the life of every citizen, every day.

Consider, now:

In the summer of 1847, Brigham Young brought a hundred and fifty of his Latter Day Saints across the mountains from Missouri, and stopped in the blank desert beside the Salt Lake, and decided to build a city. It was, by all the fabulous angels out of Mormon's book, an unlikely spot for a town. No fresh water. Blazing heat. Earth thick crusted with alkali. But the wagon train stopped and they began the business of founding a city, a civilization, a new and bizarre culture, with no more excitement than we bestow upon a picnic luncheon.

Every single notion that sprang from Brigham Young's amazing head in the days of that beginning is a vital part of Salt Lake City in this day. He was weary of the little alley streets of the old cities and so, with only a few cabins built, he laid out thoroughfares of sweeping breadth. He was disappointed with the stinginess of Nature in his oddly chosen paradise, and so he imported trees and flowers, planted them and nurtured them, even when he was hungry. He knew the golden worth of amusement, and so he sent men out at once on a three-hundred-mile journey to bring back wood fit for the making of organ pipes. He built, with an extraordinary cunning, a taber-

nacle where people might listen to the organ when it was finished. He built a theater where troupers fresh from their savage battle with the desert might chant, a little haltingly perhaps, the strophes of Hamlet and Macbeth. He wanted such a temple as would house with propriety the strange figment of his religious dreams, and so for years men and animals brought stones from the farthest mountains, and for years men piled these stones upon each other to make a strangely beautiful church.

All of these things are Salt Lake City now. It is the most perfect example of the frontier community, for the simple reason that the pioneers, coming in, cast off all old habits, all old beliefs, all the established approach to life — fashioned out of hand new beliefs, new habits, a new and sometimes astonishing approach to life. It is the only frontier spot in all the world wherein the ennobling arts were considered as important things in the very genesis of settlement. Music and painting, sculpture and architecture, began when the first log was cut and laid down to make the foundation for a cabin.

And these things survive. I may say that they are decadent, that the stream of religious faith is running thin, and so all the elements of the city's life which that stream nourishes are beginning to lose their freshness. But at this moment they survive in a community that has grown as a steady continuation of that first settlement. The church of Mormon still dominates existence.

I talked to one of the churchmen. He was engaged in his two years of missionary work — a sacrifice of business and home concerns which every Mormon must make when he is called upon. His current task was to explain to inquisitive visitors the ways and the beliefs of the cult. I sat

with him in the Tabernacle, and from the hard benches that the pioneers had made with their hands we listened to the organ playing César Franck and Bach and Schumann.

"Our church is different from all others," he said, "in this respect: It undertakes to fill completely the lives of its members. It undertakes to provide all amusement and education, to direct all charity, and even to participate in business affairs. The church is wealthy, of course. It has developed this whole State, and was responsible for the great discoveries of gold and silver and copper. Consequently, no Mormon is allowed to suffer poverty. If a business is failing and the owner is a worthy man, he receives financial help. If the farm year is bad, the farmers are carried through until a good year comes. A great deal of money, in fact, has been spent on the farms, as the church has financed many irrigation projects.

"The organization of members is complex and very thorough. Every one, men, women and children, belongs to his proper group. Each group has a leader. And our communications are so perfect that every Mormon in Utah can be reached in the space of six hours.

"The education given to the children is thorough and it is liberal. And any talented child is immediately given encouragement, by his family, by the organization to which he belongs, and by the council of the church itself. As a consequence, the Mormon community has produced artists and musicians and writers out of all proportion to its numbers."

I said, "What proportion of the people in the State are Mormons?"

He said, "About forty per cent. We are very hospitable

to people of other faiths, and every sect — at least all the prominent ones — has a fine church in the city. Our interest in the government is that of any other citizen and the church as an organization makes no attempt to dominate politics. Our last governor was not a Mormon."

I asked, "How about the young people? Are they sticking to the old beliefs?"

"A good many of them are breaking away," he said. "We have our heretics, like any other sect. But with us it is necessary to accept the faith as it is, or leave the church. We do not countenance any change or compromise. Nothing has been altered since the beginning, and it never will be altered. I except, of course, the matter of polygamy. That had already served its purpose, which was to build up a population quickly, when we made our agreement with the United States Government to abandon it."

I knew, of course, as all people visiting Utah must learn quickly, that polygamy still exists. It is surreptitious, and the church council inveighs constantly against it. But the remoter farms are terribly lonely places. The work on them is fierce and unremitting. It is not unusual to find two wives sharing a single husband.

We strolled about the grounds of Temple Square. None but Mormons are admitted to the Temple itself, and the great stone edifice has no visible door. It stands like some monstrous mausoleum, with the gilded figure of the angel Moroni trumpeting from its high gable, and in the air there was the sound of a ghostly chorus singing in unfamiliar harmonies.

"Where does the music come from?" I asked.

"The workers for the dead," he said. "Every day twenty-five hundred of our people give up their usual pursuits

and go to the Temple. Their rituals are designed to bring the families of the dead together in heaven. I sometimes wish that gentiles could see the inside of the Temple. It is filled with priceless paintings and statuary, tapestries and furniture enough to make a museum. The finest thing of all is the main altar in a subterranean chamber. It is a great table supported by twelve life-size oxen made of solid brass, and it is lit by golden candlesticks."

The twelve brazen beasts were perfectly in key. All of the ritualistic symbols were in key: the symbols of the blazing sun; the single, wide-staring eye that looks down constantly upon all worshippers; the moon; the gulls; the sheafs of gathered grain; the sickle. They were explicit, harsh, direct. They matched the explicit glare of the sun and the hard contours of the earth. They grew, quite clearly, from their environment, and so they were satisfying. They had meaning because they were of the nature of the desert itself.

I talked to two women. One of them was an old woman. She had married her husband forty years before, in the days when one man might have many wives. I said to her, "Will you please tell me what it was like? Can you remember how you felt that afternoon when you waited at the door for your husband and he came down the road with a new wife on his arm? How did you feel when it was dark, and they told you good night, and you were lying alone while they were together?"

She said, "I know how difficult it is for this generation to understand. You do not worship God. Then, it was different, for we had faith and we loved God. That was part of a plan that God had made, and who were we to question it? What did we amount to in the great scheme?

She was a lovely creature and a good one. We worked very hard together, she and I. We were happy, because the love of God was so much more important than any little earthly love. There were no quarrels in our house. We were laboring to make a city, and look at the city we made."

The second woman was young. She was a devout Mormon, married, and she burst into a peal of laughter when I spoke to her of polygamy.

"If Jim ever came home with another wife, I'd scratch her eyes out," she said. She laughed again. "Oh, it was right in the old days. There were more women than men, and they were trying to build up from nothing. But they were saints. They could give up everything on earth for their ideal. I'm afraid we are not so saintly nowadays. They don't need the laws to prevent polygamy. The women just wouldn't stand for it. Not for one minute."

I went to the University of Utah to see what they were teaching. I found one of the most liberal colleges in the country, with the humanities holding a high place. The state government is in control, with no direct interference from the church, although the church founded the institution and still exerts the indirect authority which it possesses in all things by simple reason of its organized minority in state affairs. About half the members of the faculty are of the Mormon faith, and about half the student body. All the comparative religions and philosophies are taught. There is no emphasis upon Mormonism. There are no forbidden subjects, and discussion is free on all matters under the sun.

Salt Lake City is an authentic community. Its culture, which is to say its way of life, is of a local pattern and not imitative, springing in almost every respect from the

way of life laid down by those pioneers who built the city out of nothing. There are handsome homes looking out upon broad, shady streets, hospitable and proud. On the edge of the lake, smoke drifts from the chimneys of the smelters; and the copper mines, the mines of silver and gold and lead, are very rich. Up and down the busy avenues the women hunt their little bargains and the movie houses banner forth their marvels and the laughter of the youth is that same shrill music that has echoed from the beginning into every corner of the world. But the pale lavender mountains, brooding over these trifling matters — the heavy presence of the Temple and its golden angel, the muffled song of the choir in its secret place — seem to give them a fresh character, to make them seem faintly different from the identical things in other parts of the earth.

· 5 ·

When you are in El Paso, you go to Juarez. You get on a street car filled with young people and with expressionless Mexicans, and with men tired after a day's work, and you go across the shallow channel of the Rio Grande because there are nothing but saloons in Juarez, and the booze is cheap.

It is a five-minute ride on the street car. And you are in a grubby little street lined with barrooms and trinket shops, an æon or two removed from the El Paso Chamber of Commerce and all the sweeping Republic that was born of the Pilgrims.

I went into a barroom. The crowd was thick along the rail, and about half the crowd were pretty girls from El Paso, out with their young men. Everybody was pretty

tight. After a while, a few of the girls were a little beside themselves in their glee at living in such a perfect world. and I was moved to lean over and speak to one of the bartenders. You could look at him and tell he had shoved ponies of whisky across the mahogany when men were toasting the election of Cleveland.

"What do you think of it?" I asked him. "I mean, the girls crowding up to the bar, like this?"

He glanced around and leaned over toward me and whispered in his husky voice, "I'll tell you," he said. "I feel this way about it — " He peered quickly about him again to be certain that he was not overheard. "When I was young, when I was coming along, they taught me to respect women."

He went quickly back to his bottles and began again his ceaseless attempt to catch up with the orders that came with steady shouting from the fringes of the crowd.

· 6 ·

The dusk had begun to settle. Behind us lay immeasurable miles of Arizona and New Mexico and Texas: long flat valleys between the mountains, deserts with cactus plants like trees, the Pecos River and the Gila. The road was through empty country marked here and there with a gaunt village — but suddenly we were in a crowd. The road was full of automobiles. The dust that they stirred up was thick in the still air. The voices of men and women and crying children were everywhere, and alongside the road there was a stream of people walking.

Slowly we moved with the astonishing press of traffic until we came to the outskirts of a little Texas town called

Gladewater. Then we understood. They had struck oil in Gladewater.

Against the horizon in all directions the bleak skeletons of the pumps stood up. The middle of the town was a brawling mass of motor cars and people, mules and dogs and storekeepers who yelled their bargains. And all the scene was lit by the burning flares of the gas lines — pipes that were stuck in the ground to lead off the pressure of subterranean vapors — burning with a fierce sound and sending bursts of smoky flame toward the sky.

The keeper of the single grocery store had pulled out the whole front of the building to make it easier for his customers to enter. The keeper of the general merchandise store had brought his stock of blankets and slickers, coats and quilts, out to the sidewalk, and he was doing a wild business with families who had found no shelter for the night and must therefore sleep under the stars. There were five thousand in a town designed for five hundred.

In the midst of things, the movie people had set up shop. Before an old shell of a building two huge electric bulbs threw their blaze upon a poster, and the poster said that Ken Maynard in the Two Gun Man was the toughest buckaroo that ever rode a bronc or winged a villain. There was a thick crowd trying to get in.

Down the street (everywhere the dust swirled in a choking cloud) there was a big tent, and you could hear above the confusion a loud clear call: "Your skill against mine, gentlemen, and the odds always in your favor. Ah! A king and a deuce, gentlemen, and your friend here is a winner again. Where are the Monte players? Step up, you gentlemen! A quick eye against a steady hand, my friends, and the odds always in your favor."

Fifty yards away a man stood on a dry-goods box. He was dressed in black and he was so tall that his head was almost obscured in the hanging dust cloud. A crowd of fifty or sixty was gathered at his feet, staring up, and his long arms were flying in savage gestures:

"What, then, did Isaiah say? 'Put aside thy vanities. Put aside thy greed. Go into the stillness of thy closet and meditate!' Isaiah was a wiser man, my friends, than you or I. He knew. Oh, my brothers, he knew that the blackest pit of hell yawns for the man who . . ."

A truck was standing among the willows down by the dry bed of a little stream. A long line of men straggled toward the truck and gathered about it, and when they came away they were laughing with a fresh merriment, talking with voices that were loud. A man was standing at the tail end of the truck. He was pouring a white liquor with an evil smell from gallon jugs into tin cups, and putting fifteen cents a shot into a bulging pocket.

The gypsies had made their pitch next door to the filling station. The hot-dog boys had cut each other's throats until the price was three for a nickel. A big canvas sign hung over a window on the second floor of the general store, saying, "Dr. Hubert Weil, M.D., Surgeon, Dentist, General Practitioner."

Givens's Tourist Camp, four hundred yards down the road, had four cabins made out of white pine boards, unpainted. A light burned in the curtained window of each small cabin. Two of the cabins had phonographs in them and both the phonographs were grinding jazz. The doors of three of the cabins were closed. The door of the fourth was open, and a girl was standing there, leaning against the jamb and smiling hospitably. She had on a short red

skirt and a bolero jacket of red and white and green, with a string of silver discs hanging down from each shoulder.

I said, "How's it going, Baby?"

She grinned. "I've worked gold and silver and American Legion conventions. Give me oil every time, Buddy."

I stopped nine men in the crowd about the truck down by the willows and asked them, one by one, "What did you come for? All this property belongs to somebody and you can't hope to own a well. What's the attraction?"

The answer was virtually identical from each of them. "Nothing to lose, is there? You might get a job around one of the pumps, mightn't you? It's somewhere to go, ain't it? What the hell."

I said to four or five women, "Where did you come from? What are you hoping to get out of this?"

One said, "I'm from Joplin, mister. Harry and me always go to the strikes, no matter what they strike. That's our line. Some of these days Harry and me will get in on some of the big money."

The others were from scattered towns. They had come because their husbands were out of work at home and they had read in the papers of big doings at Gladewater.

It was pretty bad. You choked in the dust and you could find nothing much to eat and there was nowhere at all to sleep. I got out, bucking the traffic that flowed in steadily from the east. Men and women and children and babes in arms. Dogs, and canary birds in cages, and a steam calliope reeling in the road. Ramshackle automobiles and old buggies and heavy trucks thundering on the way.

In my mind there grew a picture of Gladewater, Texas, twenty years from now: a little village of four or five hundred once again, surrounded by the gaunt, abandoned

towers of the oil pumps. The wells having gone dry, it has occurred to nobody to pull down the skeletons out of kindness to an outraged landscape. They stand there, glum reminders of the big strike and the few million barrels of the precious juice that is long since burned up along the beckoning concrete roads.

· 7 ·

Out of all the frontier, I have chosen a few panels. They do no more than suggest the story, for the frontier is so vast.

And it will be the frontier forever, from the Dakotas down to the Rio Grande and from the Gila up to the Grand Coulee in Washington. The hushed canyons and the incredible slopes, the benches and the mesas and the boom towns, the cities founded on a bizarre conception of God — these things will not be tamed to the fleeting urgencies of a workaday world. The frontier has its own civilization. Humanity has soiled the splendor of the earth here and there, and also, deep in the vast retreats, humanity has reached manfully toward the stars. And even if the drama of man's striving, the conflict of his perfidy and his heroism, cannot quite match the colossal setting of the frontier, that setting has forced him into a way of life which faintly echoes the grand manner.

V

The Pacific Rim

THE most formidable boundary in the world lies between the United States of America and the Empire of the Pacific Rim. It is a wall of mountains three hundred miles wide. In a succession of days I crossed over the little notches in that wall: Berthoud's Pass and the Rabbit's Ear, Mullan, and the Camel's Hump and last of all Snoqualmie. It is a very remarkable thing that the smallest bit of the way of life taught to us by the Pilgrims should have survived the conquest of those passes. For even when sitting comfortably in an automobile, this year of grace 1932, Snoqualmie was a fierce undertaking. It was twenty-two miles from the eastern base to the summit and twenty miles down the western slope — miles that were a tortured serpent of roadway, white with snow, very beautiful and very dangerous.

The black pines stood up with all the symmetry and all the indifference of a primeval forest. Down the lengthening corridors were shadowed lanes that led to an ineffable quiet and loneliness. Always, a few feet to the

right or the left of the front wheels, the road fell away to an abrupt drop of a thousand feet or so.

Even while I struggled to keep from running too near that precipice, and so sliding over and tumbling down and breaking my long neck, I was wondering whether the America I knew had really filtered past the Rockies and the Sierras and the Cascades. I was tempting myself with the notion that the Pacific Rim would turn out to be an odd and beautiful and sometimes exciting territorial possession rather than a part and parcel of the Republic. Two thousand miles later I was persuaded to think this notion pretty sound. But this is the story of the two thousand miles. . . .

They call Seattle the Queen City of Puget Sound, and that is as good a catchword as any to describe a conventional modern city that happens to occupy a superb natural setting. For, certainly, the Sound is a lovely piece of water, bulwarked from the Pacific by the snowy coastal mountains and wandering with its small bays and lakes into the very middle of the city itself. The Japan current, flowing across the ocean, steadies the climate and keeps it warm. Roses bloom always in Seattle and the grass is an emerald green the year around.

They make their money there by cutting down the great pines and fir trees of the mountain forests and sawing them into lumber, by trapping the salmon that come up the rivers to spawn and putting them in tin cans. Canada and the Canadians being close neighbors, there is a natural interest in the affairs of the British Empire. In the newspapers you will notice that equal attention is given to the news from those two distant capitals, Washington and London.

It was my fortune in Seattle to make the acquaintance of a political gentleman. He spoke with the slow, pleasant voice of the old South, and on the panelled walls of his office were faded letters addressed to his ancestors by the great of America, when America was still young and before Seattle was founded: John Marshall and Thomas Jefferson and James Madison. But when I adverted to these potent signs of his beginnings, he smiled with amusement.

"Why," he said, "all that is behind me now. Four years ago I gave up all that, gave up my fixed position at home and came out here. I was bored with tradition. It dominated me when I didn't want to be dominated. I even gave up my practice of the law. Took a new deal all around. Went into real estate, became interested in politics, and started out on an entirely new sort of life."

Two years ago, he said, he was a candidate for governor of the State. Nearly won.

"But, good Heavens," I exclaimed, "you had been a citizen of the State only two years, then!"

He laughed again. "It's the beauty of the country," he said. "You see, nobody was born here. They are all newcomers. There's no disadvantage in being a stranger when everybody else is a stranger too. And it is a rule of the country that nobody asks where you came from, who your father was or how far back you can trace your ancestry. As a matter of fact, the less you have to say about the country back east, the better off you are."

I went with him to the meeting of a political luncheon club. It was held in the private room of a cafeteria on Third Avenue and there were about a hundred men and women present. Most of them were elderly and nearly all

of them had that inescapable air of people who make politics a hobby — they were punctilious in their insistence upon the letter of parliamentary rules, a little shabby in their dress, enormously satisfied with the fine public spirit they deemed themselves to be showing.

Among their number was a former mayor, a painless dentist by profession; a lady who had been active in the original woman's suffrage movement in Ypsilanti, Michigan; and an old, trembling man who announced with great pride that he had voted for Tilden. The meeting began with the singing of the "Star Spangled Banner." Two high-school girls played a short program of studies for flute and piano. A high-school boy, leader of his senior class, told us what he was getting out of his public education.

He was a bright boy, a three-letter man in the athletic activities of his school and a ranking scholar to boot. He spoke with much spirit: He was being trained, he said, both mentally and physically. He was making valuable contacts with fellow humans and learning the great lessons of self-control, of give and take, which are so important to the successful life. He could not conceive of a better life than the one he was living, he said, and the people of Seattle would be even more proud of their city if they really knew how excellently the public-school system was managed.

Thereafter, the political speeches began. With the benign face of George Washington looking down upon them, they discussed the affairs of the nation. My friend did not make a speech. But he consulted quietly with those who were to make speeches and suggested their line of thought. All of them nodded eagerly as they listened to him.

He confided to me, "This is really the opening wedge of

our national campaign, but none of these people know it. We want an instructed delegation from this State to the Chicago convention, and two or three of us know the man we want nominated."

The speeches were long and urgent. They drew frequent applause. Most of them concerned the past glory of the Party, and one of them came closer to the present than a passing reference to Woodrow Wilson and to Seattle's growing importance on the Pacific Coast. But this satisfied the members. When they broke up, it was with a fine feeling of optimism that the Party would come out all right at the November elections. They stood around for a long time, swapping expressions of confidence, reminding each other of the great battles won and lost at past conventions, speaking almost continuously in the faintly stupefying argot of political affairs.

As my friend was most hospitably driving me out to his home, I said to him, "Do you really take that foolishness seriously? Has that sort of thing any real meaning in politics, in the affairs of state?"

"You must be a child," he said. "It's all there is to politics. You get your little groups like that to working, and each of them becomes a power in his own little group. But you begin gradually. Give them George Washington and the pioneers of the Oregon Trail to begin with, then work slowly up to your man. When you're ready to spring him on 'em and demand a vote, they're certain to be with you. Putty in a smart man's hands."

I said, "Do you ever talk to them about really important things? All these billions we are paying the veterans, for example? Do you try to inform them about things like that, and guide their opinions?"

"Controversial," he said. "You do everything you can to avoid controversial matters. You don't want any arguments. Talk to 'em about things they can all agree on, like America's great destiny, or the villains in the opposition party. That gives you harmony, and you're helpless without harmony."

He had a beautiful home. In that country, it is the practice for a dozen or so of the well-to-do families to unite in the purchase of a large plot of ground, park it after the manner of a private domain, and build their houses in the little groves of evergreens that are so abundant everywhere. My friend's home was in such a park. It looked out from the broad windows of a sunny room across a terrace and a thickly turfed lawn to the blue, shining water of the Sound. Grass and water and the distant snow-capped mountains made a scene of unparalleled tranquillity, and it was not difficult to imagine a man living in such a house with a fine seclusion, immensely comfortable, making the long days pass with slow delight. But my friend was a fellow of violent energies. I knew that he never sat on that terrace in the sun, inviting his soul to the contemplation of the lovely earth and sea and sky that lay before him. To him, that would have seemed a criminal waste of time.

I said to him, "You will be a big man some day."

He winked. "Only excuse for living, in this part of the world. Be a big man. And the opportunity is there, especially in politics. Nobody has ever tried finesse on them. Up to now, the whole story has been 'Pass a law!' No matter what the difficulty, they think it can be cured instantly by the passing of a law. No matter whether the law invades human rights. No matter what it does to the fundamental conception of American citizenship. The Consti-

tution of the United States is just a bothersome antique to them, something for the old fogies to argue about. Nobody out here ever heard of the Bill of Rights. Their theory of government is sumptuary power — for the legislature, the governor, the policeman on his beat. If a man gets troublesome, or argues too loudly that his privileges as a citizen are being attacked, throw him in jail until he promises to be good and then boot him over the state border. Let somebody else have a malcontent like that.

"They never heard of liberalism, and they don't believe in the noble sentiments about government by the people and of the people. You walk a chalk line, by God, or you take the consequences. But a smart man can get in there and make shrewd use of their queer notions of legality. He would only have to know how to pass the right laws, and to oppose the ones they wouldn't like day after tomorrow. It's a big opportunity."

"You know what you're doing, all right," I said.

"Maybe I do," he said. "But of course you can't ever tell."

For some odd reason I felt a little depressed when I left him. He was such a charming, friendly gentleman. He was moving so surely into power. And he had such childish, outmoded notions of the government of men. He was so utterly unaware of the strange things that are stirring in the business of government all over the world. He had lost all recollection of the fact that the pawns in his heady game were human beings.

Here was the beginning of an observation that bore in upon me more and more strongly as I went deeper into the Pacific Empire. The people of that enchanted land are behind the times. The great barrier does not retard the ar-

rival of news from the outer world, the blank facts of those events which go forward day by day. But it does retard, to a remarkable degree, the passage of those subtler things we call ideas. It checks the slow outflowing of thought, of conceptions affecting the flux of existence. While living becomes incredibly more complex every day, they insist upon believing it still a simple thing, easy to manage if a fellow will be a little shrewd. The sluggish current of world affairs, of the affairs of their nation, falls into an eddy along the eastern slope of the Rockies. It seeps through after a long delay, changed and more sluggish still, to spread itself thinly upon their golden shore. And — but perhaps this tenuous thread may be followed a little more clearly as we push southward.

· 2 ·

Moving down the coast from Seattle, a thing which had been a vague detail of motoring in all the United States became suddenly the most insistent fact of motoring. And this was the number of people on the roads: hitch-hikers and tin-can tourists and all the range of vagabonds that falls between — together with the amazing opulence of accommodation for them. There were many miles along the Redwood Highway that seemed like village streets, so steady was the stream of pedestrians mushing along. Men and women and children, some hatless and coatless, some loaded with papier-mache suitcases or craftily planned duffle bags. And all waving for a ride.

Unless you have driven those roads lately, you have not the faintest conception of the number of people who are hurrying along. Few of them have any destination.

They simply find it easier to fill their bellies by begging, and petty thieving, and sporadic labor if they keep moving. There must be nearly a million people, walking or in cars, flowing along the roads of the country — homeless and not wanting a home. They have adopted the nomadic life, by preference or by necessity. And at night, as you drive along, you see their fires burning by the scores under the wide sky.

I talked to many of them. There was one:

I came into a long straight reach of the highway, and in the distance a car was drawn up with a woman beside it. I came to a stop and looked at her, and she was altogether dreadful looking: about twenty, grimy and tattered, with a dirty and sullen face. Her car was a ruined old sedan, the back seat choked with a heap of filthy baggage.

She said, "I ran out of gas. Can you lend me a gallon to get to the next filling station?"

I was willing for her to have it. But how were we to get it out of my tank? She made no reply, but fished among the rubbish in her car and brought out a gallon jug, a rubber tube. When she handed them to me, I shook my head, and so she went to work, drawing the gasoline out. When the jug was full, she turned to her car without a glance or a word.

I said, "On a pitch like this, how long does it take to get ten gallons?"

"About an hour, generally," she said.

"Gas is thirty cents a gallon," I told her. "That means you are mooching three dollars an hour. Not many doing so well."

"Yes, it's pretty good," she said.

"Where you from?" I asked. There was an Arizona license plate on her car.

"Back East," she said.

"This thing bring you all the way?" I asked, pointing to the car.

"No," she said. "I hitch-hiked for six months. Then a fellow gave me this. Somewhere in Arizona. I forget the name of the town."

"Where you going?" I asked.

She looked at me with stolid surprise. "Going?" she asked. "Just going. You ain't dumb, are you? I just keep going."

"How about food?" I asked.

"I manage," she said.

Another car had come in sight at the top of the road, and it was obvious that she wanted me to get out of the way. I was interfering with business. So I wished her godspeed, and drove off.

Then, again:

I saw him ahead, lying in the road, stretched fairly across my line of movement. I had to stop, and he got up and ran to the window of the car, thrusting a yellow paper in my hand. "Look, Buddy," he said. "A call from the old mother. Telegram. Dying, see? How about a lift?"

It was not a telegram. It was the wrong form, a sender's form, and it was scribbled over in pencil, some brief, illiterate message to "My darling son." I pointed out the deficiency in his technique and gave him suggestions for improving it. He became sullen.

"I'm a veteran," he said.

I told him I was getting terribly bored with the whining of the veterans. And I asked him to tell me the real reason

for his urgency. "Why do you want a ride?" I asked. "You are not going anywhere."

He cursed harshly. "I'm going out of this place," he said. "I've got to get somewhere else. A man can't get himself a decent meal along these roads, much less a smoke. These bums have worked the country to death."

At close intervals along the road were the tourist camps, hundreds and hundreds of tourist camps, each one a huddle of tiny cabins, each cabin holding two single beds and a washbowl — dollar a night. On the outskirts of all the towns, five or six of such camps were to be found, and they were scattered through the open country, in the forests and along the rivers. Roofs for three or four million people.

I talked to the proprietor of one of them. He was behind the counter of the little lunch room that he operated in connection with his twenty cabins — a lunch room and grocery store combined, for many of the wanderers prepare their own grub. He had come out from New Hampshire three or four years ago, after two years in a small Eastern college and the acquisition of a great romantic passion for the West.

"You get all kinds," he said, "and most of them are moochers. I have eight or ten a day wanting a free bed and free meals. If I gave to all of 'em that ask, I'd be out there tramping the road myself pretty soon. But you sort of hate to turn 'em down. Sure as you do, you'll get to thinking you refused somebody that was really starving, or sick, or something. Here two or three nights ago a boy came in. About twenty, I guess. He just stood around while the folks was eating and didn't say anything. Finally everybody was done, and left, and he was still standing there. I says to him, 'What is it, Bud? Hungry?' And he

says, 'Guess I am. Was wondering if I couldn't wash up the dishes or something and earn a meal.' I told him there wasn't any work he could do, but I'd feed him. He ate like he was famishing, and then I let him sleep in one of the cabins. Well, do you know, that boy was up at daybreak next morning and washed every window in this lunch room before I woke up. You like to help a boy like that.

"Then you get the other kind. A couple was in here a little while back. Boy and a girl that had struck up together somehow. Hungry, they said, and could they have a cabin. Of course they told me they was married. She looked a little peaked, and I fed 'em. Told 'em to pick out a cabin and get some rest. I forgot all about 'em until two o'clock next day, and when I went to get 'em, they was sleeping like logs. I hustled 'em out, and they cussed me to my face for not letting them stay another night. You get all kinds."

· 3 ·

They have told you that San Francisco is one of the few cities in America that have character, that have a genuine distinction. What they have meant to say, I think, is this: San Francisco is one of the few cities possessing a very strong sense of continuity, of a present that stems in logical and orderly fashion out of the past — and it is one of the few cities whose streets and waterways and hills have been celebrated in romantic literature. Frank Norris and Ambrose Bierce, Jack London and Bret Harte account for the glamour. It was they who bestowed a certain aura upon the Embarcadero and Telegraph Hill, upon Market Street and Chinatown. But the feeling of continuous, in-

tegrated being has its roots in the circumstances of the city's birth and its upbringing.

The influences which created San Francisco were utterly different from the influences which created our familiar cities of the East. Here were neither Pilgrims nor Cavaliers nor paunch-bellied traders but, from the very outset, vague wanderers of a hundred races coming up from the sea to pitch their lives against a back drop of monkish Spaniards. They came from everywhere. They were in search of a thousand varying ends. And out of their very mongrelism, so to speak, a civilization built itself. The civilization was local; it could not be imitative because no two people could agree on what should be imitated. It did not follow the current already set along the eastern seaboard for the simple reason that these Californians had not the faintest notion what that current might be, they had not the faintest notion what the East was doing.

The growth of the town was from the Pacific. Even the Easterners who came arrived from the Pacific, most of them. And, in some fashion that is quite inexpressible, the influence of that wide and gusty sea put its mark upon the town.

There was the earthquake and fire of 1906. The city was destroyed. It happened to be destroyed just at the end of an era, for with its time-lag the Pacific Coast was just going into the twentieth century. The city was restored as a twentieth-century city, and the most of the old manner was left among the ashes. It gave itself, in its new manifestation, to industry. It became American, in the sense that it gave its spirit and its destiny into the hands of corporation-directing boards. But civilizations

die hard. Certain elements of them are, indeed, almost indestructible. And the thread of that old San Francisco, tolerant and boisterous and smelling of the tumbling Pacific, runs a thin warp through the modern town, even as it stands to-day.

I confess that when I rolled onto the ferry at Sausalito after the long golden ride down the Sacramento valley, it was the glamour that filled my mind. Darkness had fallen. The bay was a vast black shadow lit timidly here and there by a few ships' lamps. Far across the water the city was pitched on its looming hill, and the glow from many lights came to us through a faint, sweet haze. A succession of images came to the mind, tableaux that framed in brief glimpses the melodrama of a hundred years: a little mission town, with drowsy priests murmuring their litanies and dreaming sadly of their adored Spain — a man running down the street and crying that gold was discovered: and the mad clamor of men greedy for that gold, ships pouring in, the rattle of deadly broils in the matchwood saloons — poor Sutter, dazed and horrified by the cataclysm of wealth that had destroyed his pastoral dream — the lumbering figure of McTeague and the mad dark face of Vandover — the thunder of the earthquake and the wild hunger of the fire. . . .

We came into the slip and entered the city through the Ferry Building. Market Street was a booming thoroughfare. Montgomery Street and Geary Street and Mission Street echoed with the familiar sounds of traffic and policemen's whistles and radio loud-speakers. These things crowded in upon the romantic fancies and engendered a thoroughly unreasonable trace of disappointment. But then, slowly, I began to find my way behind the common-

place noises, the commonplace façades of the tall buildings.

Izzy's place was a dark, narrow doorway in the midst of the old Barbary Coast. The Barbary Coast, in more rugged days, was a purlieu of gaudy vice. It ranked, proudly, with the Old Town at Marseilles and the more iniquitous dens of Port Said as one of the three or four most celebrated havens of depravity in the world. But the stern forces of the reform brethren tamed the Barbary Coast long since. It is a dark and empty way now. The flamboyantly decorated lobbies of the peep-show theaters have gone to wrack — the plaster Pan is a chipped and sorry sight — and rough oak boards are nailed over many a doorway as if the sin which one time flourished within might somehow still be contagious.

Izzy endures, however. You go up a narrow flight of stairs, pulling a hemp rope on a bell to let them know you're coming, and at the top you enter a room. You say at once, "Yes, this is San Francisco." For it is unlike any boozing den you have ever seen. Around the walls are booths made of high partitions. Within the booths there are unpainted deal tables, surrounded by benches, and innumerable young people are sitting on the benches. Boys and girls, they sit and argue hazily about Art. They represent a faintly astonishing survival of some old Bohemia, a noisy avatar of a half-imaginary Latin Quarter and a wholly imaginary Greenwich Village.

Down at the end of the room, a tall and very black Negro strums a guitar, singing under his breath in a tongue that is a preposterous mixture of bad Spanish, bad English, and Gullah. The reek of garlic and frying meat comes from the kitchen where two or three Mexicans

grumble perpetually at their work, and behind a bar that is grotesquely small, in view of his awful bulk, stands Izzy.

He weighs about three hundred pounds. His clothing hangs on him like black bags. An old hat is pushed back from his swarthy face, and there is something clownish in his vast hands as they pick up the tiny, fragile liqueur glasses in which he serves his decoction. He is what you might call a Levantine of the Golden Gate, an unholy mixture of races, Mexican, Jew, Italian, and simple Californian, and he was once the most dreaded crimp in all the Pacific waters. Hundreds of lads have taken his geniality as an honest thing, drunk deep of his liquor, and come at last out of a thick stupor to find themselves in the forecastle of some ratty ship, bound out for the China seas.

He serves, now, grappa, at twenty-five cents a shot. It is vile — bearing the same relation to French *marc* that even the best Chianti bears to Clos Romanée. But under its influence, which is not at all subtle, Art for Art's sake still flourishes as a strange and somehow touching anachronism. While he talked dreamily of the old days, while euphonious ships' names such as *Andromeda*, and *Pacific Princess*, and *Farallone* fell from his thick lips, the boys and girls hauled the ancient platitudes over fresh coals, happily unaware that the platitudes were ancient, or even that they were platitudes, and made brave plans to flog a dull world until it became a paradise.

I sat down at one of the tables and said to a girl, "What do you do?"

She was a slender, nervous child, eighteen or thereabouts, with pale blue eyes which should have been weak

but somehow managed to seem full of vitality. She said, "I'm a model."

I said, "What made you want to be a model?"

She said, "I won a beauty contest down at the beach, and then I quit school and went to work modelling."

"Where do you live?" I asked. "Home?"

"No," she said, "I left home. You couldn't expect me to stay around that place, could you?"

"Why not?"

"My old man is a power in the church," she said.

"Come here every night?" I asked.

"Sure," she said. "The whole gang meets here. But this stuff sort of gets you." She stared at the white liquor in her small glass. "I'm going to quit it before long."

I said, "Do you really paint? Do they ever get around to any real painting?"

"Why, sure," she said. "Last month I went with Joe up the coast — " she nodded toward a thick, earnest youth with a shock of red hair who sat alone in one of the booths, his feet propped on the table in a clutter of used dishes and empty glasses. "We stayed up there a week and he painted two pictures."

"Good pictures?" I asked.

"Oh, all right," she said.

I said, "Doesn't something tell you it's phony?"

"Sure," she said, "I know that. Everybody knows that. But it's a hell of a lot of fun while it lasts."

"Then what?" I asked.

"You're getting morbid," she said. "Have a drink."

She talked a little longer, had one more glass of the grappa, and strolled over to Joe's booth. With great deliberation, she made herself comfortable on the bench

beside him, put her small head on his shoulder, and went to sleep. He did not seem aware of her presence, but sat staring at the wall before him as if it held some enchantment.

Everybody was getting a little drunk. The pitch of the laughter had become more shrill, and now and again a boy or a girl would burst into a loud, incoherent speech.

I said to Izzy, "Every night?"

"Same crowd," he said. He drew the corners of his mouth down in a grimace of deprecation. "I started out to run a place for sailors," he said. "Somebody wrote about my place in the Sunday newspaper, and all these kids started coming in. The sailors stopped coming in. But that's the way it goes."

"Art," I said.

"Yeah," he said. "Art." He stared around the room at his customers, and on his face there was an expression of profound contempt.

The next day I went to the Bohemian Club for luncheon and there I encountered a somewhat different approach to art. Something more than two thousand San Francisco business men belong to the Bohemian Club. They belong to it because art of one sort or another interests them, because they wish to participate actively in its pleasant mysteries. The passive rôle of spectator is not quite enough for them.

Seventy-five of them have made up a symphony orchestra, with the leading shoe merchant of the town for conductor. As many more have got together a brass band. In the theater on the top floor they perform every fortnight or so a play written by one of the members, with scenery and costumes designed within the club walls. There is a

good deal of sculpture set about the expansive halls, and a great many paintings look down — chiefly the work of merchants or brokers or bankers, though here and there a familiar name crops up.

They are, the members of this club, the only genuine amateurs of art that I have found in America. With them, it is not the culture craze. The Bohemian Club has been there a long, long time and stems directly from the peak of San Francisco's indigenous civilization. It is not the Rotary spirit, the half-secret hope of commercial ends that might be served, which makes men join the Bohemian Club. It is simply an honest and not too long-faced interest in intelligent amusement.

In a small room on an upper floor, four of the members tuned up their instruments and played a couple of Haydn quartets for me. The first violin was an insurance man. The 'cellist was floor director in a department store. The second violin was a dentist, and the viola had some sort of job in a ship chandler's office. They played with enormous delight, without the least self-consciousness or imitation of the professional manner. They did not seem to care in the least whether I was listening or what I might think of their performance. They enjoyed the making of music more than anybody I have heard in a long time, receiving quite obviously a deep satisfaction from it. The club's library of music was quite extensive. The quartet practiced two or three times a week, generally managing to find something new among the shelves. They spoke with amused pleasure of the slack times in business affairs which gave them more opportunity to play together than before.

I worked the conversation around to business, and at

the big round table in the grillroom, with eight or ten merchants and manufacturers and salesmen at their lunch, I made them listen to my yarns about the coal mines, the Pittsburgh steel mills, the Lake Shore industrial cities. It was difficult, because they were not very much interested, yet I had some purpose in boring them. I wanted to know what they thought, if anything, of the events that marched beyond the mountains — where they placed themselves, their own business interests, in the shifting pattern of American commerce.

They thought nothing at all. They made no effort to place themselves in the pattern.

One of them was a retail merchant with a big establishment. He was a little peevish. "That's the trouble with you Easterners," he said. "You want to master-mind about every situation that comes up. You are always wanting to do something about things, fix business up brown, work everything out by statistics and theory. I've learned that the only way to get along is to let conditions take care of themselves."

I said, "You mean, let God fix it."

"Well, if you put it that way. Man certainly can't. He fouls everything up when he tries."

"Then," I said, "where is the tradition of the marvelous American business man? According to your views, he turns out to be just an opportunist after all, the child of drift, taking whatever destiny may deal out to him and making no effort at all to understand destiny or control it. Business destiny, I am talking about. You're not interested in the lessons of the past nor in planning the future so that violent disturbances cannot take place. An infant could be that kind of business man."

There was a general agreement that I was wrong. That I was not a business man and therefore could not possibly know anything about it. That all the study in the world would not help to control or predict the rise and fall of markets. Such things just happen and, a broker went on to say, "If you are caught out on a limb you are just lopped off." They had read nothing of the new theories about planned economies. They had no clear conception of the currency situation in the United States. They had read a little, sketchily, about the Russian experiment, but generally regarded it as a grotesque exoticism, a thing which could have no possible effect upon their own lives.

We strolled upstairs again. They were playing some modern French music in the theater, and as we sat around listening to it, I felt a little more firm in my secret opinion, to wit, that the old cliché is wrong: the cliché which holds that Americans are superb business men but know little or nothing about how to live. I felt I was learning, in all these miles I traveled, that the American is a rather poor business man, taken by and large. He has no conception of commerce as a constant stream, with the course of the past clearly marked and the course of the future subject to reasonably accurate prediction. His resources of shrewdness and defense in bad times are almost negligible — for with every surge of prosperity he goes rushing forward, burning his bridges behind him. He bases most of his faith for the future upon legendary and nebulous gods: the gods whom he calls with childish blandness, "The big fellows" or "The men who are running business in this country" or "Our best business minds." Pinned down, he cannot possibly say what particular men he means by such phrases. They are not, he will say quickly, executive officers of the

government, or senators, or members of the cabinet. They are a vague combination of bankers and corporation directors and great manufacturers. He does not even take the trouble to know their names. He just believes, vaguely, that they will make everything all right.

On the other hand, he knows a good deal about how to live. There is, for the most part, a warming and friendly grace in his private existence: hospitality, enthusiasm, and a very sure feeling for amusement. He has, in short, learned so well what to do with his leisure that the office grind has lost nearly all of its wonted charm for him.

He has never really devoted his mind to business, — his basic intellectuality, that is to say. Work has simply been an anæsthetic to prevent his mind from becoming bored. Now he is learning how to occupy his mind, even if it be with so trivial a thing as golf, and it is business that bores him.

· 4 ·

San Francisco, however, is nearly as foreign to the rest of California as it is to the familiar United States of the Middle West and the Eastern seaboard. You must go a little farther south to find the California you have expected: brilliant in the sunshine, bland, with life very close to the surface.

Go but a little way and you find yourself among the ghost towns, those brooding monuments to a fundamental characteristic of the Pacific people. I went to one of them. It nestled in a little valley of the Sierra foothills, a long street of gray houses, empty, crumbling, and forlorn. In some of them pieces of ruined furniture still sat about, pots and pans and remnants of forgotten clothing. And in many

of them I came upon heaps of paper: ledger sheets and sales accounts and even the most intimate of personal letters, all abandoned in a wild fury of haste to go away when the gold along the creek bed paid out.

I have said that these towns indicate a fundamental characteristic of the Southern Californians. I mean that they give a very clear hint of the Southern Californian's attitude toward his rooftree, his community, the setting for his personal existence. Such things as houses and towns are to him in the nature of equipment, as it were — items of necessity like clothing and horses and automobiles, to be used without feeling and cast away when their purpose has been served. He is always willing to sell his house if the price is good enough. He is always willing to abandon home, friends, his mild interest in his community, if it can be shown that better profits, a better job, await him in the next community. His roots, in short, extend no deeper into that shallow soil than the needs of his pocketbook demand.

Only a few miles farther on my way, for example, I came upon that companion piece to the ghost town — a ghost house. It had been, in its prime, a handsome place. Large, with a wide lawn, and white pillars staring down out of a broad white façade. But then they struck oil in the front garden. Four big derricks were put up. The householder, rich now, simply moved out and left his mansion to the winds. Then the oil played out. Nobody thought to pull the derricks down. Nobody had any wish to recover the big white house or its Eucalyptus trees, torn ragged by the storms. The big windows stared vacantly and the acres lay idle, abandoned under the hot sky.

There were many such. But I return, for a moment,

to the ghost town. A few feet down from the main street, under the shadow of a great overhanging rock, a bearded old fellow bent beside the creek and shook a pan. He was so intent upon his work that he did not hear me when I came up, and I stood watching him for a moment. He dipped the pan and whirled it diligently; he peered into its bottom, and over his shoulder I could make out a few yellow specks lying among the wet sand. He got them out carefully, heaped them on a scrap of chamois that was spread out on a stone, and looked up.

"Any luck?" I asked.

He nodded and dipped again. Whirl and peer, whirl and peer. "Not much," he said. "A little, though."

"What's your average?" I asked.

"About three dollars a day," he said.

"Been at it long?" I asked.

"Forty years."

"And never a big strike?"

He shook his head. "I'm getting tired of lying about that big strike," he said. "You know — " he put his pan down and stood facing me, "you know, there never were a tenth of the strikes people told you about. Lies, mostly. I remember 'way back. I never knew but two men that averaged more than ten dollars a day. Whenever there was anything big, the engineers found it for companies."

I asked where he came from originally. Vermont, he said, but a long time ago. "Went off to sea, then landed at Frisco. And for forty years . . ."

He stared off among the hills that he had tramped with such enduring hope.

"Alone all the time?" I asked.

"One year in a town called Whiskey," he said. "Long

enough to have a boy. But then I left. Couldn't stand it. Ain't seen the boy for thirty years, ever since he was a baby."

"What do you do with your money?" I asked.

He squared away suddenly, as if he read some sinister intent in my question, but I reassured him.

"Oh," he said, "I'm going back to Vermont to die, some day. But not yet. No, sir, not for a long time yet."

Years were heavy upon him, and it did not seem possible that he could live more than a year or two. But that thought was very far from his own mind. "I'm heading north next week," he said. "Heard they was finding it again up the Rogue River."

"Going to try to find your son?" I asked. "Ever?"

He chuckled deeply. "If he's rich," he said, "he don't want to see me. If he's poor, I don't want to see him. I guess I'll let well enough alone." He chuckled again.

I left him, bent once more over his pan, peering still with an unquenchable eagerness into its depths.

Down all the little valleys are the symmetrical gardens of the Japs. And it seems altogether appropriate that Japs, or some alien and mysterious people, should have bent this land to the plough. For nothing grows there of its own free will. Eucalyptus trees and asparagus, figs and oranges and roses — all must have the magic of incessant care bestowed upon them. From the purple Sierras to the endless beach of the Pacific the land lies inert, willing to endure the crops upon its bosom if some laborer will devote eternal toil and patience to the germination, willing to let cottages and palaces find an anchorage from the boisterous winds. But it is indifferent earth. It seems utterly oblivious to the small encroachments of the little human

animals. It would change only by a cast shadow here and there if the humans left and never returned again.

In all that unearthly beauty, the figure of man and of man's works seems trivial and temporary, and the rare encounter with a familiar American face under the turquoise sky is usually an unhappy one.

I remember a house. It sat not far from the edge of the desert, in the midst of a scrubby grove of oranges. It was very hot that day. The air seemed to crackle with the heat and with an electric dryness. As I passed the house, a pale face looked out from a cellar window, and so I stopped and went up to the door. A thin woman came out. She was an exhausted creature. You felt that body and hope and spirit and desire had collapsed with a sudden accumulation of defeats. She spoke in a wan, tired voice.

"You're from New York," she said, seeing the license plates on the car. "Lord, Lord," she said, "I wish I was in New York. . . ."

I listened. She had come out, with her husband, from Dutchess County. They had bought an orange grove from a fine prospectus. They could not work it now. The heat and the exhausting wine of the air was too much for them.

"We're going to die!" she said. "We'll die in this place! Nobody but the Japs can stand it. And think what they told us!"

I gave what comfort came to my mind and got away as quickly as possible, for it was a little harrowing simply to stand there and listen to her bitterness and her despair. She went quickly back into the darkened cellar as I drove off. It was the only room of the house cool enough for them to inhabit.

· 5 ·

I went to Hollywood. But what can I tell you of Hollywood that you have not already read with a far greater wealth of detail in the dozens of movie magazines, the scores of movie columns in the newspapers? There are only a few small things. . . .

Toward the last of the eighteenth century a little train of monks was traveling from the Mission of San Juan Capistrano to San Luis Obispo. They came, at the end of a day's journey, to a little grove of trees. Trees are not common in that country, so they rested for the night in the pleasant shade. When they moved on next day, Father Felipe blessed the spot and called it the Holy Wood. Thus, Hollywood.

It is not a city. It is simply a suburb of Los Angeles and has no mayor, no officials, no corporate identity. Of all the dozens of moving-picture companies in the region, only three have their studios within the confines of Hollywood. Not a single star lives there, or a director of the first rank.

There are thirty-one stars in the colony. But there are six thousand featured players and part players, seventeen thousand extras clamoring for a day's work. About one thousand girls arrive every year at the foot of this particular rainbow, dreaming of fame and money. There are two hundred and forty accredited journalists permanently settled in Hollywood to tell you about these people, and each of the journalists writes an average of a thousand words a day — the equivalent of three normal books every twenty-four hours.

But I had an interesting afternoon. I went to Beverly

Hills, to the home of a director, and met a number of celebrated faces. They seemed, at the outset, to be the creatures of Utopia. For they were young and handsome, rich and famous and full of health, and therefore should have been the happiest people of all the world. Yet, alas, the hounds of discontent were at their heels. They were harried by ambition and an odd sort of loneliness and, most of all, by the desire to be understood.

One of the most lovely of the women stars said earnestly: "Please make people realize how we actually live. You have already seen that there are no night clubs in Hollywood, that there is not much night life in the film colony. How could there be when all of us work so hard? For three weeks now I have been up at five o'clock every morning, on the set and in my make-up at half-past six. Do you suppose I could be running around all hours of the night when I'm doing that? I'd lose my looks, and that means I'd lose everything.

"We have no private life at all. Everybody in the world thinks it his privilege to know everything we do and everything we say. Oh, I suppose we are public property more or less, but you would like to have a few little things in life just for yourself, wouldn't you? Even at home . . ."

But, surely, you have read all this before. The professional writers on the world of the movies have written it a thousand times. And the absurd thing is that it is true. The interviews given to the movie magazines are genuine. Movie stars really think such things and say such things. They have no secret reality to be discovered by even the shrewdest observer. Among them, of course, is all the variety of personality and character that distinguishes the human race generally, but they have stilled most of

their homely little virtues and vices in behalf of their audiences. They have fallen into a pattern of behavior and thought that makes one movie star almost identical with every other movie star. Even in the privacy of the bath, they live in the world of false-face.

Toward the end of my visit at the director's home I became a little excited, perhaps unduly excited. The usual discussion of the virtues and defects of Hollywood had been going on, and I have no doubt that my observations became too spirited, for I finally exclaimed, "But it is all made out of papier-mâché! Everything — the filling stations, the studios, the mansions and even the churches with their Neon signs gleaming among Gothic turrets. It's all just a movie set. Even this house is papier-mâché. Look!" And I punched my finger at the wall of the antique Spanish living room. To my chagrin, the finger went clear through. The wall *was* papier-mâché.

That night I went to see a successful actor, a handsome, kind fellow who had surrounded himself with the luxuries appropriate to his immense earnings. He told me that he had paid six hundred thousand dollars for his house. He lived alone, but of course it was necessary to avoid the suggestion of penury, and so he kept nine servants. There were five cars in his garage, and not far away, in a little cove, his yacht was lying at anchor.

I said, "You like it?"

"Yes," he nodded. "I like it. I have a good time. I'm on top of the heap now, going great, and you have to put up a swell layout like this or they'll think that you're stingy. You see, when a man saves money out here, it's a confession that some day he will pass out of the big salaries. So you don't save money. You put on a big show. That

means you feel perfectly sure of yourself and your future in pictures."

I said, "Well, do you feel sure?"

He laughed. That gay, contagious laugh which you have heard a hundred times. "Certainly not," he said. "Everybody goes up and down. The average life of a star is five years. People just get tired of looking at the same old face. But you don't have to count yourself through, just because you're done with starring. A real actor can always get supporting parts if he's willing to forget about his pride."

"What are you going to do, when your name comes down out of the big lights?" I asked.

"I'm going to try to make five thousand dollars a year. That sounds silly, doesn't it?" He waved his hand about his Renaissance drawing-room and laughed boisterously. "You don't really own any of it," he said. "You sort of rent it. You can afford to buy anything as long as you're on top. Then you are pushed off the top and you have to sell everything back at half price. If I could be sure of getting that five thousand a year, all clear and all mine, I'd be happy enough."

I went through the studios and was duly astonished by the immense resources of machinery and materials and human ingenuity. I sat around with some of the writing men and laughed with them at the absurdity of their tasks. I was rendered impervious to the enchantment of feminine beauty, by reason of the excessive abundance of it everywhere. And I came away more than ever speechless before the spectacle of the moving-picture industry, more than ever incapable of thinking any rational thoughts at all in the face of such an immense irrationality.

The town itself, the borough, rather, called Hollywood, is a trim little place, rather quieter and cleaner than most of like size and rather more tame. It is chiefly populated by middle-aged women who live upon small annuities and, having no anchor anywhere, move out to live close by their favorite heroes and heroines of the screen. When there are openings at the cinema palaces they gather in such dense and insistent crowds to see their idols that policemen on horseback have to ride them down.

· 6 ·

Los Angeles, the city itself, is five miles from Hollywood along Sunset Boulevard. It is the capital of the Pacific Empire, amiably tolerant of the distant East, amiably bored with the Middle West and the South. Yet, for all its remoteness from the America we know, it manifests in many ways a remarkable exaggeration of all those things which we are wont to call typically American. You will notice their extraordinary civic pride — their feeling of a personal proprietorship over their climate, their gorgeous hills, and even such portions of the Pacific waters as beat upon their shores. This extreme preoccupation with a particular spot upon the earth is a caricature of normal American civic pride. It leads them into somewhat wild overstatements of the local marvels. And any criticism of climate, hills, trees or oceans is a personal affront to any citizen who might hear it. It is discreet to apologize at once for such a thing. Once, I can remember, I produced at a gathering of natives an advertisement clipped from a magazine of vast circulation. The advertisement sang the marvels of Los Angeles as an all-year resort. It pic-

tured the glory of swimming in the blue Pacific, among other things, and the great fun to be found among the movie stars at the Hollywood night clubs. Hesitantly I pointed out that the Pacific is much too cold and rough for swimming, the greater part of the year, and that a visitor might stay in Hollywood for six months and never glimpse a single screen performer.

They made me wish very quickly that I had kept these small objections to myself. They were furious. They were very unpleasant. They made it very clear that I was not a welcome visitor if I insisted upon harboring such thoughts, for I had committed, it seemed, the inexcusable crime of *lèse-majesté*. That is their feeling about their town.

They are very strongly under the Spanish influence in building and decoration. But I did not find this very attractive, because it was not appropriate. The people of Los Angeles certainly have not the Spanish temperament. They do not worship *dolce far niente*, for they are up-and-doing folk, and it seems a little strange to find so many carefully tended patios with nobody lounging in them. This Spanish art of the Pacific is under the same suspicion as the flair for Navajo blankets and thunderbirds and all the grotesques of a primitive, alien art which flourishes a little farther to the eastward. It is a fad, and so it is a pretense, and so it is a little irritating.

But they live pleasantly enough, working moderately hard and consciously enjoying nearly every breath they draw of the winelike air which envelops them. All the domestic life I saw was completely dominated by the women, who were in every case full of a marvelous health and energy and altogether free from vague Eastern neu-

roticisms. An unbelievable number of these women, housewives and mothers, write novels and short stories. Writing has become their domestic hobby, taking the place of embroidery and lace-making and putting up jam. The amateur practice of literature has countless devotees along that shore, and though I suppose the psycho-analysts could make something of the fact, I would not dare encroach upon their domain.

My host, one evening, was a real-estate man. He was successful, yet he lived with becoming modesty in a small Spanish house at the bottom of a pleasant, sub-irrigated lawn. The small talk at the dinner table, of books and plays and old Spanish legends that hang over the ancient missions, all sprang from his wife — the mother of two good-looking boys who wanted to be halfbacks at Southern California. The real-estate man hardly spoke at all; indeed there was small opportunity given him, until we sat over coffee in his library. Then he came into his own. He was a fisherman. He told me of the great battles he had fought in the swarming waters off Catalina Island. His life as a fisherman was far more intense than his life as a real-estate man, but still he found time to equip himself with certain fundamental beliefs:

"You people in the rest of America," he said, "do not realize for a moment how independent of you we are out here. We are self-contained. Your industrial upsets, your unemployed, your communism and high-brow theories of government mean nothing to us, because we are apart from all those problems. Of course, we have problems of our own. But they are different. They are ours and we are the only people who can deal with them.

"If you come down to the truth of it, it doesn't make

much difference to us who we send to Congress or the Senate. We don't care very much who is elected President. Oh, we go out and vote because we get interested around campaign time, but all of those doings at Washington are so remote from our real lives.

"Nobody could starve in this State. He could always get out on the ground and raise enough to keep himself alive. We don't have much of your unemployment problem, because there is always plenty to eat for everybody.

"We don't even need your markets for our products. Of course, we want them. We make our surplus, our luxuries, out of them. But we could get along comfortably enough without them. We don't have to be dependent on another metropolis for banking or industry, commerce or education or culture. We can provide all those things for ourselves, in our own way. Even if we were cut off completely from America, severed permanently, we could make the adjustments easily enough. California could live perfectly without the slightest communication with the rest of the world."

I said, "You know, I think you really mean it."

He said, "Why, of course I mean it. And I said the same thing at a banquet the other night. About a hundred men were there, good, solid fellows. When I said what I have told you, they cheered. They weren't cheering me, personally, you understand, but the ideas I was expressing. It's the way we feel out here. We've never believed there was any real advantage to us in all your Eastern influence, and times like these make us certain we would get along just as well without you. Maybe better."

But as I wandered about Los Angeles, looking for the basic meaning of the place, the fundamental source of its

wealth and its economic identity, I found myself quite at sea. The Chamber of Commerce people told me about the concentration of fruit, the shipping, the Western branch factories put up by concerns in the East. But none of these things seemed the cause of a city. They seemed rather the effect, rising from an inexplicable accumulation of people — just as the immense dealings in second-hand automobiles and the great turnover of real estate were an effect. It struck me as an odd thing that here, alone of all the cities in America, there was no plausible answer to the question, "Why did a town spring up here and why has it grown so big?"

The road from Los Angeles to San Diego is called El Camino Real. There are signs along it saying, "Mrs. Street's Perfect Eats" and "Own Your View of the Pacific." And there are gimcrack villages, flimsy imitations of antique Spanish villages primed for the ballyhoo. But even these blemishes do not prevent El Camino Real from being the most beautiful road in the world, if your fancy in roads turns to the flamboyant. Its white ribbon flows through the orange groves and along the edge of high cliffs, with the blue sea marching always to its assault upon the mountains. And San Diego, at the end of it, is a quiet and peaceful little city, drowsing in its memories of the Spanish brothers who came up out of Mexico to build missions which still are lovely things, subdued and pensive in all the brilliant landscape.

Across the border from San Diego is Agua Caliente, and that makes me think of Del Monte, which is on the Monterey peninsula not far south of San Francisco. Between them, these two places made me feel sure that nowhere in Europe are such urbane and pleasant resorts. Also, they

gave me a notion, treasonable no doubt but persistent, that we would have done very well to let the Spaniards keep Southern California. Under their indulgent rule, it would have been such a golden place for holiday-making, whereas our own attempt to bring the country into key with the rest of America has been uneven, full of explosive enthusiasms, fitful in result. The holidays always smell faintly of business, and the business has a terrible time getting down to brass tacks.

The Americans who live in California melt into the violent drama of their environment. They are absorbed, somehow, in the flight of mountains and the beat of the mighty ocean, the unmatched glitter of the sunshine, the turbulent air that smells like wine. The *mise en scène* dominates them to a remarkable extent. It has, by its own wild authority, removed the inhabitants from the familiar pattern of American life. But it has not yet finished working with them. Their own pattern is still vague, forming, experimental. And all of them weave at it with an urgent weaving. They give that impression: a little intoxicated with the business of existence, they work like ants to give their existence a meaning, and a coherence, and a symmetry that is absent from it now. To this labor they bring immense self-confidence and quite a heartening amount of laughter.

VI

The South

BY almost imperceptible alterations in the landscape and the speech of the people and the look of the villages, you pass out of the West of America and into the South. The tempo of existence falls slowly, slowly. You become aware of the dark swarms of Negroes, eternally lounging, eternally murmuring with their amiable arguments. Squalor moves a little more boldly into the main streets. A brooding quality falls upon the earth, deepened to the shadow of melancholy here and there with the dim outline of a ruined and forgotten mansion house among the trees.

When you have crossed the Mississippi and plunged a little deeper into the country, languor exudes from the earth until it is more than languor. It is a vast inertia filling a vast land. The pulse of life is almost stilled. And yet you sense that the pulse beats inexorably, full of a strange immortality, and you are troubled with the faint suspicion that all the world about you is secretly amused at your urgent bustling.

In your first hour or two at New Orleans, you are likely to decide that the town is different from the country, that the languor pulls up short at the city limits and surrenders to the familiar wild energies of commerce. The skyscrapers are piled up to their usual altitudes. Automobiles move at a normal pace through the streets. The whistles of the traffic cops are shrill, and nowhere in sight is there a fine old Southern colonel lustily holding forth upon the good old days or suggesting that a julep is apropos to the occasion. Except for the wide, hot streets and the oleanders in flower, the throaty undertone of Negro voices, New Orleans seems at first to fit the pattern of an Eastern City or a Western one.

But then you stroll down Bienville Street and into the Vieux Carré — the ancient original New Orleans which still lies at the very core of the city — and the air is languid once again. The tall windows behind their shallow wrought-iron balconies are shuttered against the heat. Figures move slowly in the narrow way: a huge black woman with a yellow cloth about her head, holding a red rose in her teeth and humming a tune — a little Frenchman with a hand-rolled cigarette drooping from his mouth, poring over a racing tip-sheet and whispering to himself — a tall, good-looking boy leaning against the hood of his tumble-down Ford and laughing up at a close shutter that opens a little to offer a glimpse of a pretty face. Now and again a street door will be open and you look down a little tunnel into a shaded garden with many people lounging. It seems very strange to hear phrases in French and Italian, Portuguese and Spanish — phrases that are usually quick and nervous — coming in a slow drawl to answer the slow, drawling English.

Then you meet a few of the citizens, not of the Vieux Carré but of the new city, people who live at the edges of the town with fresh small parks all about them and flowers thick in the still streets.

I sat in the patio of a modest home. It was three o'clock in the afternoon, but under the banana trees, in the deep shade of moist stone walls, it was cool. My host was a shipping man and I had called upon him, naturally, at his office. He had suggested immediately that we go home.

"But," I had objected, "I don't want to interrupt your work."

"I was going home, anyway," he had said. "It's so much cooler there. The world won't stop turning, will it, just because I shut my desk up?"

So now he lay at his ease in a low chair, listening with great contentment while his wife talked to me.

"You ought to understand about the Creoles," she said. "Some people get the idea that a Creole is a person with Negro blood. That isn't true, of course. Anybody of French or Spanish blood in New Orleans is a Creole, and we have a lot of them because Louisiana used to belong to France and Spain both — but you know all that history. Our proudest folks are the Spaniards, the pure-bred ones with no American or English or French in them at all."

I said, "What about good old English names like yours?"

"Most of them come from people like poor old grandfather," she said. "He came down the river with tobacco from Kentucky, sold it and then lost all his money to the Creole gentlemen in the gambling houses. Couldn't get back home, and so he just settled."

I said, "What do you do? How do you live?"

Her husband broke in. "We sleep all year and wake up for the Mardi Gras and for the end of the fiscal term, just in time to discover that we'll have to do better or go out of business."

She laughed. "Exaggerating, as usual," she said. "An old Southern failing. All Southerners feel sorry for themselves, even when they won't allow anybody else to feel sorry for them, and all Southerners exaggerate. Characteristics of the country, sir. Or, suh, I believe you prefer it."

"I am not exaggerating," he said, "when I hold that we have in New Orleans the best coffee in the world, the laziest niggers, the worst government, and the most sensible attitude toward that miserable toil which is necessary to put bread on the table and a roof over our heads."

"Meaning what, that last?" I asked.

His wife spoke quickly. "Meaning that the menfolks are about as lazy as the niggers — "

"Meaning," he cried, "that labor is just a stupid necessity and not a thing to be taken too seriously."

We laughed, and I said, "I've got to get back to my dull questions. What do you live by in New Orleans? What sort of human beings are you?"

Quite gravely, she said, "None of us have a great deal of money. Most of our amusements are simple — playing a little bridge, going out to eat at the good restaurants now and then, spending an occasional day or two in little boats among the bayoux. In the Mardi Gras season we have all our social activities in a concentrated period, dinners and dances and formal things. And whenever there are a few extra dollars we go hurrying up to New York for a big time.

"The Catholic Church dominates religion, of course, and

you know what that means — liberal viewpoint toward personal behavior, a good deal of tolerance toward the sins that mortal flesh is heir to. No puritanism.

"Life goes along pretty evenly. Not much excitement. Most of us who are terribly proud of living in New Orleans haven't the least notion why. Nobody that I know has any idea what's going on in other places, except, of course, the stage and such things, in New York. Other places just don't seem important, and to tell the truth, nothing that goes on here seems very important either. We just sort of live along."

Thereafter, it was difficult to keep them in the present. They told fine, gusty tales about the past — better days and better ways — and we had cooling drinks brought by a black man, and we fell into a lazy, romantic preoccupation with handsome belles and debonair gentlemen, long since gone to dust. There was no doubt that the past was an integral part of their lives. They dwelt with memories and legends as the Pittsburgher dwells with his pall of smoke and the Californian with his climate. In any thoughtful mood at all, their minds swung backward.

Fifty miles away from the city, I sat on a huge tiled verandah that looked off through white columns at four thousand acres of sugar cane and heard quite a different sort of human being speak in much the same fashion. He was, for that country, a well-to-do gentleman. His grandfather had come down from Virginia when Andrew Jackson was President, and had settled the plantation, bought some slaves, cleared the swamps for planting.

Beneath the sun that shimmered over the tassels of the cane, I could sense the weave and beat of labor: of black men toiling down in the dense foliage and grunting at

their work. The mules at the plows and harrows on a far hill sent up a column of dust that was golden in the bright light. The ice tinkled in our frosted glasses. The mistress of the plantation sat in cool white beside a bank of ferns, smiling faintly at her thoughts while my host talked slowly:

"I suppose we have contributed virtually nothing to the growth of America since the war. I mean the War between the States. The value of the cane is not very much, comparatively speaking. Our business men are just ordinary fellows, content to earn a decent living. Art and letters, architecture and learning, statesmen and thinkers — only an occasional gift from here. In such things, I suppose we are still barbarians, and that is sad. But we have spent all our thoughts and all our ingenuity on one small thing: how to live. I am persuaded to believe that we have learned our lesson moderately well.

"Myself and the friends I have, in the town and in the country 'round about, we live slowly. We do not struggle overhard for money or fame or the progress that we hear so much about in other places. In the last analysis, our Southern country is a pastoral land, and such land does not change very much with time. People call us lazy. But you cannot realize the great indifference we feel toward what people anywhere might think. We are vain about the way we live. Quiet, calm, unexcited. Pretense and show have very little place." He waved his hand in a slow gesture that took in his house and the lawn, the near fields and the far, low hills. And I fancied that I saw his meaning. For although the house was beautiful, although its lawns were fresh and wide, and the flowers blooming richly in their ordered beds, it was

still a plantation house, set in the midst of work. No considerable change had been made in it for forty years. Its furniture was showing wear and its plumbing hardly adequate. Nothing had been done to shield the house or the verandah from the harsh cries of the plowmen, from any of the sounds or the movements of laboring men who sweated under the sun.

I said, "You make me envious. Can you tell me a little more? How your days go — what you do — ?"

The figure in white, cool and faintly smiling by the ferns, spoke unexpectedly in a soft, amused voice. "He spends the mornings admiring his acres from the back of a horse and giving his foremen advice that they never take. He spends his afternoons admiring his acres from this verandah. And he spends his evenings with his cronies, admiring them while they admire him."

I thought that he might be a little annoyed, for he was a man of such rigid dignity. But he broke into deep laughter. "My wife's father," he said, "was born in Vermont. It accounts for her restlessness. She can't get accustomed to any man who sits down while there is still daylight for work."

I said to her, "And how do you occupy your time?"

He interrupted with a wink, before she could begin. "She spends twenty-four hours a day worrying about what sort of girl that son of ours will marry. I hear, by the way, that he has been behaving scandalously in the town — "

"Henry!" she cried. And we all laughed at her confusion.

I asked her whether she voted. She did not, nor did she play bridge, go to church, or listen to the radio. She had

contemplated the purchase of a radio for several years, but finally had decided against it. She left her house no more than five or six times a year, to attend dinners in the neighborhood or the opera in New Orleans. But, she said shyly, she was studying Greek.

"Why?" I asked.

"I have always wanted to study Greek," she said. "I would like to read Æschylus in the original. One of the professors at the college comes out once a week, Sunday afternoons."

We strolled about the house grounds. The Negroes that we encountered bowed and scraped. A few old hounds joined our procession. There were a dozen superb horses in the stables. They belonged to the son of the family who, it appeared, was something of a rake and a sportsman. This reputation that he enjoyed was not displeasing to his father. It was quite proper for sons of that family to sow a generous crop of wild oats, so long as they kept their names out of the newspapers.

We talked a little of politics — state politics. He had no interest in affairs at Washington, no confidence in the Washington government, a firm and impervious belief that the South's defeat in the War Between the States was an unspeakable catastrophe that could never, now, be mended.

· 2 ·

From New Orleans eastward, the moss hangs in long beards from the live-oaks, and on every side the worn fields lie empty, scarred in the sun. Time has dealt brutally with the little towns and there is a pathos in their shabbiness — in the half-hearted concealment with a little paint, a few

nailed boards, of cornices that are crumbling and doorways that are battered. Everywhere, figures are lounging: men with browned faces and Negroes whose voices seem to bubble like some giant bubbling pot.

"I bet you a thousan' dollars, nigger. . . ."

"Mouf money! Mouf money. . . ."

Deep, sustained laughter.

And in the drugstore, while the radio chants its monotone: "Why now, Mr. Nelson, all dressed up in Sunday rig, ain't you? Must be a weddin' in yo' family."

"To tell the truth, Mr. Greene, my everyday pants is about wo' out. It's a ground-hog case."

Deep, sustained laughter.

You do not see women in the towns. You see them as you drive along the road, toiling about their houses, staring out with incredible wistfulness at the cars moving past. You become conscious of a dreadful poverty, a thing of haggard cheeks, and of children's faces that are pale, thin, a little desperate. Yet it is a mistake to judge always by the appearances. There are always incongruities to be found where they are least expected, and the ill-dressed old gentleman who nods from a tumble-down porch might often turn out, fantastically enough, to be the squire of the county.

I pulled up, once, at a house somewhat larger than the rest, wanting a drink of water from a cool old well that I saw from the road. It was in no respect a fine house. Comfortable looking, with a wide porch and a fresh coat of white paint, but simple and old. Chickens pecked in the front yard. Dogs were sprawled under the roof of the well. And fence palings were down here and there.

A tall man came down the steps to meet me as I walked

up, and he greeted me cordially. When I asked for water he said, "Why, come and rest a moment and have a glass of buttermilk with me and the parson." I went with him up the steps to the porch. He introduced me to a rather youthful preacher and then said, with a broad smile, "The parson is trying to relieve my soul of its burdens and my pocketbook of its thin stand of greenbacks, at one and the same time."

His wife came out, a woman in plain clothes, past her youth, but pleasant-looking and with a warm friendliness about her eyes. We all sat down in the cool wind that rustled the chinaberry trees.

They had been talking about religion and life. The man went on, apparently at a point where my intrusion had interrupted him. "Now take my boys," he said. "Both off at college, learning things I never even heard of when I came along. They told me when they were here last that they didn't believe in my kind of religion, or yours either, parson. To tell the truth, it turned out that they didn't believe hardly anything I believe — about the church, or how to make money, or the Democratic party, or how the young folks ought to behave.

"Of course, I argued with 'em. But I tell you, I've got a lot of respect for those boys. And I'm not one of those that believes a man is a fool until he's fifty years old."

The preacher said, "I'm pretty young myself, if it comes to that. I try to be tolerant. Don't suppose I succeed very well. Most young fellows, I guess, think they are certain to be right."

The woman spoke. "You're doing a good work at the church. I can tell you that. The crowd you had last Sunday was a joy to behold."

"Thank you, ma'am," said the preacher.

The man said, "We're going through some mighty big changes in this world. You have to keep your eyes open or you'll be left in the shade before you know it." He turned to me. "I guess you folks up North think we're powerful ignorant down here. I reckon we are, for that matter. But even in the backwoods, you can sort of tell when something is happening in the world.

"When those boys of mine say to me that the South is 'way behind the times, full of laziness and religious fanatics and ignorance, I have to agree with 'em in a way. We have some things, maybe, to balance off those faults. Nobody ever hears about them and I suppose nobody wants to. But those boys of mine . . .

"The youngest one, he's twenty, said to me, 'I'll make you a proposition. You finance me for another five or six years and I'll find out how to help the South. I'll get a good general education. I'll spend a year or two going into every town and village getting the facts. And then I'll go into politics, or something, and spend the rest of my life helping the South get forward.' "

The woman said, bending eagerly toward us, "You know what we told him? We told him he could count on five thousand dollars a year for the rest of his life, and we wanted him to give himself up to doing something for the South. Alabama, by preference, but the whole South too."

The man said, "If he didn't do any better than clear out this Ku-Klux Klan and these rotten white trash that do all the lynching, that would be enough. I've got no patience with that kind."

The preacher said, "I can't think of any better way to

spend your money. I don't suppose I have any right to bother you with that little request of mine, now."

"Well," said the man, "I'm still holding to the old-time religion, for my part. Too late to change. It'll be all right for you to go ahead and count on that four hundred dollars from me. But none of it for foreign missions, mind you."

I gave the preacher a lift into the little village where he lived and dropped him at his white wooden church near the crossroads. I said to him, "That farmer talked as if he really has a good deal of money. The place doesn't look like a rich man's house."

"Worth nearly a million," the preacher said. "But he doesn't believe in extravagance, or putting up a show. He's the finest man I've ever known. I hope I can live as tolerantly and generously as he does."

The money had been earned, he said, from the raising of cotton, the careful buying and selling of farm lands, the operation of a warehouse in a town not far away.

· 3 ·

I think Atlanta is an uncommonly beautiful city. Some generous division of the world's talent has given it a remarkable proportion of architects who can make a house of moderate cost into a pleasant and seemly building. The lawns are broad. The winding streets are lined with trees. Flowers bloom everywhere.

When I was there, the mayor was involved in difficulties because he had lately announced that he was against prohibition. The moral forces were after him tooth and nail and in Atlanta the moral forces are strong indeed, stronger

and more articulate than in any city I ever visited. I went to call on the mayor and found him a lean, dyspeptic man, lounging back at his desk, smoking his cigar, his mouth permanently twisted in a grim smile of inner amusement.

We had not chatted very long before I recognized in him a characteristic of many Southern politicians: the habit of speaking with an exaggerated crudeness of language, a deliberate imitation of the most unlettered among the voters. When I finally asked him, "What is your theory of governing a city?" he grunted and stared at me. "You give 'em what's good for 'em," he said.

"Who decides what is good for 'em?" I asked.

"Me," he said.

"And what *is* good for 'em?"

He thought for a minute, puffing his nickel cigar and frowning in a most forbidding fashion. "The thing to do," he said at last, "is to keep 'em from thinking about the government at all. Don't let it worry 'em. Don't let it even interest 'em. A man that's worrying about how he's governed ain't fit for nothing else. How can a man take care of his business and his children when he's all worked up about liberty? Naw! Whenever a man gits to talking 'liberty, liberty' you know he must be out of a job."

I said, "How are you going to come out of this prohibition fight?"

A city councilman had walked in and dropped into a chair, a round little man whose cap proclaimed him to be a motorman of an interurban trolley line. He spoke up. "I was saying only last week," he remarked, "that I wonder to my soul why you New York folks drink liquor at all. It don't give you no reactions. You don't insult nobody. You don't knock nobody down. You don't fall down your-

selves and you don't even git sick. What's the use of wasting good liquor anyhow, when it don't do nothing to you?" He laughed deeply.

The mayor nodded. His head went slowly up and down and the corners of his lips turned downward at a sharper angle. "The main and chief reason prohibition is so strong in the South," he said, "is because the average Southern wahoo takes four helpin's, acts polite to everybody downtown, then goes home and blows off steam. His wife generally gits a black eye in the process. After such an' such a number of wives had got black eyes, the women folks got together, and there you are. It ain't goin' to be no different, long as the women can vote and control the preachers, until somebody teaches these Southerners to drink calm, like the rest of the world."

I said, "How does politics look to you, generally?"

He stared at me and said very slowly, "The kind of government we got at Washington ain't going to last out another ten years. Why? Because it ain't no good, that's why. Ain't that reason enough? Leave out all the explanations. Leave out all the beautiful and touchin' sentiments. And you come down to four words: it ain't no good. It don't accomplish nothin', it costs a lot of money, and it creates mo' trouble than it cures."

"What would be better?" I asked.

"Lop off about two thirds of the statesmen prowlin' around the halls of Congress," he said. "And then don't pay no attention to the rest of 'em."

That night, I went to dinner in a pleasant little bungalow that was almost hidden behind trees of flowering crêpe myrtle. Four young women and their husbands were in the company and after the immemorial fashion of their

kind, the talk went for three hours on the children. Each of the women had a first baby. The men sat almost silently, smiling a little, content to hear the familiar stories of their offsprings' pranks. At intervals, however, the men strolled back to the kitchen, where two-gallon jugs were standing, filled with pale corn whisky. They drank an incredible amount of it. And I began, there, a series of memoranda which led me finally to the conclusion that nowhere else in the country — save perhaps New York — is there so much drinking as in the South. Perhaps it is because whisky is so cheap there — a dollar a gallon for the rawest grades — but the consumption is really enormous.

It was particularly noticeable among boys. On Saturdays and Sundays they make the roads doubly dangerous as they careen from town to town, bawling their glee to the high heavens and destroying whatever luckless men or beasts get in their way.

At our small dinner party, however, there was of course no manifestation of the liquor's effect. It was as sedate a gathering as any one could wish. Presently, one of the men called me off into a corner.

"I'm a lawyer," he said, "and here's a little case that might interest you. I suppose you remember all about that Alabama case: the six young Negroes arrested for assault on two white girls and sentenced to death — and Clarence Darrow, the I.W.W. and all the professional liberals in the world rushing in to get the publicity and show the benighted South how to run its affairs. Well, about three weeks ago, one of my partners read the notice of a conviction in a South Georgia court. A Negro man, accused of killing a white man, was arrested, tried, convicted and sentenced to death in about three days. It was, from the

brief record, a clear case of railroading, and we decided to do something. You understand, it was just a matter of ethics with us. We knew nothing of the merits of the case, as it had not been reported at any length in the newspapers. But we were interested.

"I went down there and made a preliminary investigation. On the strength of that, we got a little defense fund together from some wealthy people here, and set out to do what we could. There were six young lawyers interested by then.

"We found that there was a genuine doubt as to the Negro's guilt. We took an appeal and won a new trial, after the local lawyer had simply given up the case. The Supreme Court issued a severe reprimand to the original trial judge, and on the new evidence we found, the Negro was acquitted by a white jury. Not one word of that whole thing ever got into the newspapers, and I'm telling you on the express condition that no names be made public."

I said, "Go a little further. Tell me the implications of that case."

He said, "The implications are simple. Contrary to all general belief, there are thousands of men in the South who are genuinely interested in giving the Negro a square deal. And I mean Southern men, natives born and bred. Me, for instance. My people have lived in Georgia for four generations. I've never been out of the State more than three or four times. But I belong to the Inter-Racial Council — joined it after my interest in that case — and we are spending a lot of time and money to make conditions better for the Negroes, to give them better education, better social conditions, better justice in the courts."

I found, through many instances, that the South is tak-

ing its race problem seriously enough and dealing with it intelligently. Particularly in Georgia, there are many new schools, excellently managed. The compulsory education laws are as rigidly enforced among Negro children as among white, and in such matters as hospital care, public health service, and the distribution of charity there is virtually no distinction between the races.

· 4 ·

Miami, in Florida, was the boom city. In five or six years, it grew from an obscure little town to the wide proportions of metropolis. The marks of that fantastic time when a single block on Flagler Street had a paper value of twenty billion dollars still are clearly written, for here and there spring up the gaunt emptiness of a half-finished palace hotel, and here and there are splendid subdivisions of real estate with handsome streets and artistic lamp-posts and never a home at all. But some strange and amiable god was presiding at that roaring birth — a birth that never was quite completed. For despite the fact that butcher boys were building mansions and money madness ruled the world with a drunken hand, Miami was on its way to becoming a very beautiful city, spread with genuine grace and symmetry along the edge of Biscayne Bay.

The proportion of gimcrack houses is incredibly small. The proportion of solid, well-planned houses is incredibly large. There is, if I might use an uncouth word, less of the "phony" about Miami than you would ever believe possible under the circumstances of its growth. When you first arrive there, with the sun glittering on white walls and blue water, and flowers everywhere, you are likely to say

"But it is the Riviera! It doesn't resemble America. It isn't like America." For it has a blandness, a light and casual overtone that is not commonly met with on our shores, a sense of genuine idleness and of amusements untinged by urgency.

Unhappily — on second thought, it may have been quite happily — one of my earliest opportunities to contemplate the loveliness of the town was afforded by a term in jail. It was not a very long term, lasting somewhat less than two hours, and the jail was an impressive establishment. From its window on the twenty-fifth floor, I could look out over endless miles of palm-lined streets and gardens thick with purple Buginvillæa. And I had companionship.

They took me there because I drove my car too fast. It did not seem to me, at the time, a very dangerous rate of speed. But Miami tops the list of American cities in the score of motoring fatalities, and they were trying, currently, to escape that doubtful honor.

At any rate, the two policemen who drove alongside and ordered me to stop said that I was going forty miles an hour and, furthermore, was going to jail. They were very unpleasant policemen. They said to me, two or three times, "You better be glad you haven't had a drink, Buddy. If you'd had a drink, it would go tougher than this with you."

So all they did was to search me with great care — a fresh and enlightening experience — fix my bond for appearance in court at one hundred dollars, and put me in jail until a friend could arrive with the money.

There were fifteen or twenty others in jail. They were sitting in a large, sunny room when I arrived among them.

Most of them were boys, amiable-looking kids of seventeen or eighteen, and all but two or three were there for some violation of the traffic laws.

"Are you going to make bond?" one of them asked.

I said that I was.

"Then you're lucky," he said.

"What happens if you don't?" I asked.

There was a burst of sardonic laughter, and two of them led me to a window. "You see that park over there?" they said. "Well, what do you think keeps it so pretty looking?"

The prisoners worked on the lawns and the flower beds eight hours a day.

One boy said, "I turned left on a red light, 'way out in the suburbs. Couldn't get a hundred dollars. Offered 'em the car, but they said they had a car. Fourteen days for me. I've been here seven of 'em. It's a racket, see? They have to keep those parks looking pretty, so they just automatically pick up five or six fellows a day. They look around for young and healthy ones that can't be bailed out."

Everybody laughed.

They said that the food was good enough; plenty of it anyway, and that they were comfortable, except when drunks were brought in. The drunks were noisy and kept everybody awake at night. On the long, unpainted table there were three or four copies of the New Testament in the Army edition. A boy picked up one of the books and held it out to me. "How about a little light reading to while away the time?" he asked. Everybody laughed. I said, "Have any of you read it?"

One of them said, "I was looking through it a while ago, but there ain't any hot stuff in it. You have to go

in the Old Testament for that. Gee — did you ever see that stuff in the Old Testament? Oh, boy!"

I said, "Isn't there a real crook in the crowd? Seems like a pretty tame jail to me."

The youngest boy pointed to a small dark fellow, about thirty, who was dealing solitaire from a greasy deck of cards. "I guess that bird is a crook all right," he said. There was no implication of disapproval in his tone, nor did the man indicated take offense.

"Jeez," he said, "they'll make me think I am a crook if they don't do something with my case." His voice was a hard, clipped New Yorkese. "Listen," he said. "You know how I landed here? Wait a minute and I'll tell you.

"I was leaving my pal's hotel, see? Going down the street to my hotel. And a cop grabs me. He says 'Where you goin'?' and when I try to find out what business that is of his, he gets rough, see? So he and another cop take me over to the station house and I get searched. They find eight hundred bucks on me. And they say, 'All right, where did you get it?' You know what I did? I showed 'em my cancelled savings-bank book from Tampa. There it was, nine hundred bucks taken out of the bank, and I've still got eight hundred left, see? Wouldn't you think that would make it right? But it didn't.

"They said, 'All right. You cool off for a while and we'll consider the case. So they take my eight hundred bucks and my bank book and bring me over to the jail. That was three days ago. They haven't even told me what I'm charged with. Charged with having eight hundred bucks, maybe, but I didn't know that was a crime. Jeez!"

I said, "It's tough all right."

He said, "I've been in many a town, but this is the worst one."

I didn't believe his story about the arrest. I don't think any of the others did. But you never make a point of such things in jail.

When I left, they gave me a number of messages to the outside world. "Call up Edgewater 1876, and tell 'em Frank is O.K." — several of the same sort. They were bringing a new prisoner in as I left the elevator on the ground floor. He was very young, and his predicament had him badly upset.

"But I didn't know that was a twenty-mile zone," he protested. "I wasn't making more than twenty-five. What can I do? I've got to go home. I've got to, I tell you. They're waiting for me. And they haven't got a hundred dollars to bail me out. Tell me what to do, will you?"

He was addressing his guard. There were tears in his eyes. The guard said, in a monotone of finality, "Tell it to the judge to-morrow morning."

· 5 ·

The keys of Florida sweep down into the Gulf in a long curve away from the mainland. They are long, low islands, covered to the water's edge with a matted growth of palmetto and mangrove. The shallow seas that surround them are stunning in their still beauty, for they feed the eye with miracles of green color in a thousand shades, and in the vast loneliness white herons and blue herons wheel against the sky, the sun beats down with unchanging warmth.

Engineers built a railroad, using the keys for stepping-

stones as it were, from Miami to Key West. The motor road clings to the fringe of the rail bed. You drive along that road, close to the jungle that presses close on every side, and sometimes you will see a face. Not often, mind, for there are not many people. And the few who are there belong to an old race. They are, for the most part, the men who built the railroad or the descendants of such men, and it is not likely that they would boast of their ancestry.

When the engineers were ready to launch their enterprise, they came upon an unforeseen difficulty. They could not get men. The labor to be done by human hands was enormous, but neither money nor promises could persuade men to live for any time at all among the dangers and the miasmal steam and the sinister brooding of the mangroves. So the labor was imported, so to speak. From the dives and the bread lines and the jail doors of New York and Chicago and Philadelphia, strange by-ends of humanity were herded down to the warm country. Once they arrived, there was no turning back. There was no way to turn back. They were given homes on great houseboats, three or four hundred men to the boat, and there they stayed until the work was done, all their leisure hours spent with a wide channel of shark-infested water separating them from the land.

It is no wonder, then, that the faces which occasionally emerge from the thick, shadowy growth to stare at you as you ride past are dark and forbidding faces. Or that, when one of them can be led to speak, his words should be a little forbidding too.

There was one, not far from the little fishermen's jetty at the tip of Lower Matecumbe, who permitted himself to be addressed. He sat before a ruined cabin when I first

saw him, motionless as stone, with black hair thick upon his forehead and gnarled hands folded on his knee. His clothing was a patchwork of threadbare cotton cloth and his feet were bare. The hut that was his home was beyond all description the wreckage of a house. The roof sagged. The windows were carelessly boarded over. The door was gone, and the filth from within overflowed across the rotted threshold and cluttered the earth.

On some pretext or another — begging water for the car, or some such thing — I stopped, and got out, and spoke to him. He did not move. No single muscle of his big frame changed by a hair's breadth. His eyes stared directly into my eyes. When he finally decided to answer me, I was quite astonished, for he nodded toward a bucket that was half filled with water and then said, as I stooped to pick it up, "What part of New York are you from?"

"The city," I said.

He stared at me. "I get to thinking about the city sometimes. I used to live there."

I said, "It has changed a lot."

He said, "Is Mullen's pool room on Fourteenth Street still there?"

I had to tell him that I did not know.

"I'd give right much to know," he said. "That's where I was last. Yes. I'd give a good deal to know if Mullen's is still there."

I said, "How long since you left New York?"

He thought for a long time. "I can't exactly remember," he said. "A long time. They got me when they built the railroad here."

I said, "I'll send you a post card when I get back and let you know about Mullen's."

"You couldn't do that," he said. "I never would get it, down here. But if you're coming down next year. . . ."

I made promises. I said, "Do you live all by yourself?"

"Seven years," he said. "I can remember that. I've been in this cabin seven years."

"What do you do?" I asked.

"Sometimes I fish in the canal," he said.

"But what about food?" I asked.

"I told you I caught fish," he said. "And you sort of pick things up. I don't need much to eat."

I got a book out of the car, one that I had finished reading, and gave it to him. He stared for a very long time at the printed pages. "You know,' he said, "I was wondering about that the other night, too. I was wondering if I could still read. I don't guess I can." He put the book into my hands. I said, "Well, good luck," and went over to the car and climbed in. He did not answer, but watched me as I crossed the dozen feet of earth, watched me as I sat behind the wheel and pulled the door shut and put my foot on the starter. When the engine was running and I had engaged the gears, he stood up. He walked very slowly toward me, stooping, moving with the curious tension of a cat, staring from beneath his black mat of hair. He came to the window of the car. His face was dark and expressionless, but some remote fire was smoldering in his black eyes. He stared. . . .

"Good luck," he said.

I drove away.

· 6 ·

My road lay along the coast to the northward of Miami, through the lush growths, the air moist with sea water.

I went to South Carolina, to Charleston. And there, in that antique and lovely city by the ocean, I found the Old South, the South of the legends, that always teeters so delicately between the superbly glamorous and the faintly comic. Of course, all the nobilities of life, all the dark plumage of the grand manner, are a little ridiculous when viewed obliquely. Henry of Navarre would not be a very impressive figure in a New York subway jam. And this Old South belongs in the channel with Henry — with Joan of Arc and the Land of Cockaigne — half truth that has become fiction and half fiction that has become truth.

I called at the office of a lawyer. I had already paused at the habitation of his ancestors for four generations back, bending over the little green mounds in the cemetery behind a superb old church. Two flights of stairs led up to his dusty little office, and I found him sitting behind a scarred oak table, contemplating the failure of forty-two banks in which he was interested. He was lean, a little worn, with a rakish cut to the lock of dark hair that fell across his forehead.

I mentioned the banks and apologized for calling so inopportunely. But his slow smile was pleasant, hospitable. "Disaster has overtaken us so many times," he said, "that it just doesn't seem to excite us any more. Now let me see — " He began ticking off the fingers of his hand, one by one. "We were shelled by the British fleet and most of the fine houses destroyed. We were burned down by Sherman's army. Deprived of nearly a billion dollars in slave property by the War Between the States. Wrecked and burned in the earthquake. You see, bank failures are among the milder evils."

"You have been marvelous, to survive these things," I

said. "It is amazing that the town did not simply disappear."

He smiled again. "There is no particular courage in our survival," he said. "A man cannot just lie down and die, you know. You keep on living. You make the best you can out of what is left."

But, a little later, I was disposed to think somewhat differently: to think that particular courage is the most striking characteristic of these Charleston people. For, in the grip of an altogether incredible poverty, they have preserved dignity, and grace, and the subtler amenities of living. They have done this without being pompous or ridiculous and without the least notion that it was an extraordinary thing. I went into their houses, surely the most pleasantly built houses in all America. All of them present their side walls to the narrow, quiet streets. A door leads through each side wall to a long porch, and from the porch, which invariably looks upon a little garden close, one enters the house itself.

There is an immense distinction between the shabby genteel and the simple lack of money in a pleasant old house. It has been so long since these people have had any considerable money that they have learned, in honest and straightforward fashion, how to get along without it and they have long ago abandoned the strain of pretending to have it. They live with their superb old furniture, behind walls which they have known since childhood, and they do not mourn because they are deprived of glistening automobiles and radios and the mechanical gadgets which seem, to the rest of us, so utterly necessary to life.

The lawyer's cousin engaged to show me some of the

old plantations. She was one of the gentlest souls I ever knew, and together we left her quiet parlor where the sun streamed in golden lines through the half-open shutters, and drove out on a long, straight road, gray under the canopy of drooping moss. She took me to the Middleton plantation.

We stood on a grassy terrace, looking down a long way toward a rectangular pool at the bottom of the lawn. To the left, a thousand japonica trees were lifting their red and white blossoms against the green. The air was full of the smell of sweet olive. Azaleas and roses were in bloom, and the tall elms were black and still against the sky.

Our feet stumbled in a cluttery ruin of old red bricks, half overgrown with vines.

"The house stood here," she said. "You can see the outlines. It was built in 1730, and all of that far land you see on the banks of the river was planted in rice."

I said, "How was it destroyed?"

"Oh," she said, "Sherman. The Federal troops burned forty or fifty like it. Some of them much finer." She cried out suddenly in her gentle voice: "Do you understand? Do you understand? Is it so very absurd and sentimental of us, down here, to keep remembering the war? Can't you see what it did to us? I should be living here, in this house, in this garden. All my friends should be living on their land. But not one of the old plantation houses has been rebuilt. There never has been any money since the war."

I told her I thought it was a criminal thing for any army. . . .

"I know how they laugh at us in the North," she said. "They think we are foolish dreamers, clinging to the past. But it was such a pleasant past, and it was needlessly de-

stroyed. And nobody in the South — the old families, I mean — has ever really adjusted himself to these new ways."

She said that she had gone driving through New England, last year. "I looked at the people in those nice towns, nice-looking people, and I wanted to ask them, 'Do you really know what you did to us? Did you know when you were doing it?' I don't believe they had the least idea."

We went back to her home, and she said, "Come up to my little studio if you want to." I went up there, a silent, bright room, and she began showing me her paintings in water color. There were a great many of them, pictures of the swamp lands and the sea, the herons, blue and white. I knew, in a little while, that I believed these to be the best water colors in America — that under this woman's gentleness and her pervading humility there glowed a talent of the first rank.

That night I sat with a young architect.

"As for our relations with the rest of America," he said, "I suppose we are in a sort of backwater. We have gone to great lengths to discourage industrialism. Several manufacturers have wanted to come in and build plants, but we have told them to go away. The smoke and the noise and the coming of laborers would disturb our lives too much. That is a foolish thing, no doubt. It is reactionary and smug. But what are we to do about it if we cannot help feeling so?"

I said, "What are your little gods?"

He thought awhile. "The decencies," he said. "We are rather puritanical, I would say. But we like to respect each other, we like for everybody to behave decently and quietly — and to do it with a little politeness. Politeness

has gone out of fashion, I know. But after all we have found it a moderately good framework upon which to hang human relations."

I walked from his house to my hotel through empty, shaded streets. It was no more than ten o'clock in the evening, but a deep silence was upon the city. I did not meet a single soul or see a single automobile. The air was sweet. The windows of the houses, with yellow light coming through their drawn blinds, were poignantly inviting. And I could only think, over and over again, "What a marvelous place to live; what an enviable anchor to existence."

· 7 ·

It happens that a piece of earth in Virginia came rather half-heartedly into my possession. I was born there and suddenly they told me that I owned something. On my way northward, it occurred to me to take my first look at this unsought property.

I went to a small village in Halifax County. There was a yellow railroad station, two stores, an abandoned tobacco house that was caving in. A dozen yellow hounds sprawled in the yellow dust of the road. A Negro was bawling at his mules somewhere, and Miss Big Sue (I remember her out of my childhood) came switching down the path in her tattered rags, the same old enigmatic grin on her black face. Men in faded overalls sat on the porches of the two stores, chewing tobacco and speaking infrequently.

There were five miles of winding, rutty clay road from the village to the farm, and on the farm there were four buildings. One was a whitewashed log cabin, a room below and a room above. Two were tall, well-built barns for

the curing of tobacco. The last was a crumbling stable, where two mules were gazing disconsolately at their shadows on the wall.

The tenant farmer came to greet me. He was a lean dark man, about thirty-six. He took me into his house. His wife turned from the open fireplace where she was cooking corn bread on a flat iron plate. She seemed nearly fifty, worn, haunted, dishevelled. We sat down and the children came in. The oldest was a boy, fifteen. From him they ranged down to a child of two — five of them in all. The man said, in answer to my questions:

"It ain't goin' so bad. I ride one of the mules down to the store once a week and get the rations. I've been careful with you, takin' nothin' but what I need, sugar and coffee, corn meal and side meat. But I'm afraid you'll think I'm runnin' up a powerful bill on you.

"We might make a pretty good crop this year. The trouble is, they don't give you no money for tobacco when you raise it. They got a combine now, you know. Time was, you would take your tobacco to the market, and they would grade it for you, and then all the buyers would start bidding on it. The man with good leaf, that he had raised careful, got a good price because there ain't never no overproduction of quality tobacco. But that's all done with. They got a combine. The buyers for the big companies just put a flat price on everything, three or four cents a pound, and the good and bad goes all together. After you've gone home, they share it out among themselves. It don't seem right, does it?"

The walls of the cabin were bare. Whitewashed logs. A garish Coca-Cola girl stared down from the space above the mantel shelf and her scant red bathing suit, her cute

parasol, the careless laughter of her blue eyes was shockingly incongruous. A bottle of Cardui, the woman's tonic, sat on the shelf. The youngest child was playing with an old rusted horseshoe.

I said to the woman, "Do the children go to school?" She shook her head. "I ain't got the clothes and shoes for 'em to wear," she said. "But I'd like for that oldest boy to learn readin' and writin'. There ought to be one of us could read and count up numbers."

I turned to the boy. "If I bought shoes and a suit for you, would you go to school every day? It's a five-mile walk each way, you know."

Never, I think, have I seen such eagerness in a face. "Would you, Mister?" he cried. "Would you? I went two days barefoot last winter, but the ice was too sharp on the road. Could I learn to read, Mister?"

Arrangements were made.

I said to the man, "What do you think of it — the way your life goes on? Are you satisfied? Happy?"

I know, now, that I would have cherished even the faintest gesture of bitterness or of rebellion from him, the least spark of anger at the squalor of his lot. But he nodded amiably. "Better than some," he said. "Nothing much, but better than some."

"And you?" I asked of the woman. She gazed at me for a moment, weighing her answer. "I could get along better," she said, "if we had a stove. I've always wanted a stove to cook on and keep shiny."

A hundred miles away, toward the sea, was Yorktown. A hundred miles away, northeastward, was Richmond: the suave ease of the Commonwealth Club — the melancholy relics of the Confederate Museum, and the faint shadow of

an old mourning that still clings to the streets — the persuasive statue of George Washington, made by Houdon — the rich, deep smell of tobacco in the factory districts — three-story concrete garages, occupying earth where not long ago stood the finest mansion houses in the country — learning and wealth and the deep intimate flavor of life that pursues immemorable traditions.

So, the South. Dreamy, slow days. Slightly terrifying extremes of poverty and of grace, of ignorance and of unostentatious wisdom, and all the profound undertones of existence striking against the emotions rather than against the mind.

For the rest of America, the obvious is always true. There are few subtleties of conduct, few hidden meanings in men or in events. But in the South the rule does not always hold. Men and manners, dreams and spoken words and cast glances are not always precisely what they seem. It is a little baffling. And it is not difficult for the visitor to drift within the influence of an odd enchantment, to fall into the error of an absurd romantic affection for that slightly shabby land, or the equal error of an uncouth irritation. Upon whichever side he leans, however, one fact is borne in upon him with augmenting persistence. The South will endure. It will endure as the South, and no matter what befalls I do not think it will lose its identity. Its virtues and its defects are rooted deep, as they are rooted deep in very old people, and they are immune to the caprice of years.

VII

The East

ALONG the Eastern seaboard, everywhere, are the deep marks of the beginning, the mellowed remains of an old land that was sturdy and grim and monstrously sure of itself — and everywhere the smoke from tall chimneys hangs like a curtain over new cities full of labor and confusion, cities that bulge incredibly out of the old earth. . . .

On the foreshore of the Atlantic, small towns and villages that are the reliquary of the Pilgrims' Pride: very white in the sunshine, empty and old and quiet — and back a little from the blue water, on the first faint rise of land toward the mountains, cities that have outstripped all prophecy, cities that have taken the bit of progress in their teeth and bolted with shut eyes. . . .

Museum pieces — and reality. . . .

The Continental Congress — and municipal probes. . . .

In all that country where so many millions have lived

and worked and struggled with their hopes and died, the contrast between new and old is an inescapable thing. You see the tombstone of an America that was, almost totally obscured by the vast clamor of the America that is. And whether you are a romantic fellow who yearns after the past or a philosopher who takes the fact for whatever it may be, you cannot evade the knowledge that there is virtually no resemblance between the two. There is a new country superimposed upon an old, crowding it down and away with an impetuous ruthlessness.

You must forgive me if I am not apt with neat phrases to describe this land and its cities. I will confess that I made a few such phrases, but now I stand a little abashed at their inadequacy in the face of thirty million men and women and children, and so I strike them out. And I will content myself with passing on to you the somewhat inconclusive hints that were vouchsafed me by people, here and there. . . .

I walked through the level streets of Baltimore and through the halls of learning in several fine colleges there. I looked awhile at Fort McHenry, which Francis Scott Key was looking at one savage night when the "Star Spangled Banner" came into his head. I saw the vestiges, in the arch of a doorway here and the paths of an old garden there, of those expansive days when Lord Baltimore went down the street in his carriage and all the goodmen bowed, and smiled, and observed to each other that all was for the best in the best possible of worlds. I heard the beat and whine of steam winches along the docks and the grumble of machines in the factories. I talked to a doctor.

He was, this doctor, a man of extraordinary contradictions. Murmuring his contempt for pretense and dis-

play, he still rode to hounds every fine morning with many whose whole lives were wrapped in the business of riding to hounds. Cursing the American habit of working too hard, he sometimes spent twenty hours on end in the operating room. And for all his manifold activities, he seemed oddly enough to be in repose, to be a little apart from the hard rush of immediate affairs.

We sat in the living room of one of those houses — red brick front and white stone trim, flush with the street, and a little stoop leading down to the pavement — which are exactly alike for block after block and give to Baltimore its singular appearance among American cities. It was a small room, but it was comfortable. The chairs were old and deep. There were a few flowers in a vase on the table and a few fine, lugubrious old medical prints hanging against the walls.

The Doctor puffed his cigarette. "I can't tell you anything about Baltimore that you don't know already," he said. "You know our reputation for liberalism, everybody living in his own fashion, more or less. You know about our tidy government and our excellent public press. You know of our theory, that we are the Free State of Maryland and so quite aloof from the rest of the United States. And, of course, Baltimore is the center for the study and the practice of medicine. But wait . . . just be patient for a moment now. . . .

There was a long pause. He puffed his cigarette all away before he spoke again. He said, "I see a great many people. I see them in the raw, so to speak. And I think this: All of our existence is too complex. We spend all of our time keeping the machinery of living in motion and thinking vaguely to ourselves that sometime, when everything is

ready, we will abandon the machinery and go to some desert island or creep into some corner — and just live.

"Well, perhaps. A few will actually do that, I suppose. But for the rest there is always something to be accomplished first, something to fix up before we can settle down to living. Medicine is a good example of what I mean — the influence of the practice of medicine upon the lives of all our people.

"You have no idea how many of us spend half our time having something done to us to keep us from dying. We have got dying on the brain. An enormous number can't really think of anything else. For them, life has turned into a complicated warfare against the grave.

"Everybody is health conscious. We have a million diseases and a million remedies. Books and magazines, radio and newspapers, car cards and billboards keep shouting, 'If you don't look out you are going to die!' Everybody who can read at all is bombarded with terrible warnings from morning until night. So the foolish ones begin to take patent medicines or go on silly diets, and the ones who are not quite so foolish hotfoot it to the doctor.

"You really can't blame the doctor when he takes them in and puts on a long face and pretends he is up against the most serious problem of his career. If he doesn't do that, the customer will just go on next door, determined to be cured anyway. Doctors make most of their money out of people who are perfectly well. When a man is really sick, and has a fever, you can give him some quinine and the fever goes down and he knows damn' well he's cured. You can get results. But you can't get results when there's nothing wrong in the first place, and so you just go on in-

terminably, treating and treating and treating, at five dollars a visit.

"Myself, now. I'm not a fool. I like to make money and I like satisfied patients. So I keep 'abreast of the times', as the profession likes to call it. I read all the medical publications. I make regular visits to the laboratories at the hospital. I learn about the new diseases and the new cures as soon as Science had discovered them — almost as soon as they are printed in the newspapers. I keep all the impressive looking electrical gadgets in my office, and I'll turn on the current at the drop of a hat. I even take a try at psycho-analysis if the patient seems inclined that way.

"Well, that's junk. All of it is junk. But my patients demand it. If I don't give it to them, they'll go to somebody who will.

"I am really equipped, by education and experience, to do all that is humanly possible for an ordinary sick man or woman. Most of the things I can do are shockingly simple. Outside of a few improvements in surgical technique and a considerable advancement in preventive medicines, treatment for disease is still largely a matter of calomel and iodine, quinine sulphate and Old Mother Nature. Of course, you cannot tell your patients that. They are so used to complexities in washing machinery and office equipment, in handling their servants and raising their children and running patented labor-savers, that they demand the same sort of thing in the treatment room. They demand something involved in the way of a cure. They think you are a simple old fool if you just give them a pill and tell them to stay in bed for a few days.

"They come to Baltimore from every corner of the land, yelling for a miracle. In nearly every case, their own

doctor back home is perfectly able to do everything we can. But you can't disappoint them after that long trip. You have to do something that their local sawbones did not think of, simply in order to ease their minds.

"You generally work out some treatment that won't do any real harm. If you are a surgeon, you operate, of course. Most of us are so expert in the usual operations and antiseptics are so good nowadays, that there really is very little danger. Sometimes it even seems to help.

"You think I am a cynic, sour on my trade. I am not. I happen to have a conscience, and it does my soul good to tell the truth. And I insist on this: the practicing physician is not really to blame. He is caught up in the immense fever for complications that controls all the rest of our living."

I said, "But Johns Hopkins. Surely that is a very fine institution."

"The best, I think, in the world," he said.

"And isn't it responsible for Baltimore's reputation as a center? Isn't it the University which draws all these people, the ones who want a miracle?"

"Certainly," he said. "But the superficial reputation earned by a few wonder cures, by a few widely reported cases that were saved by genius, is not the thing that makes the University important. It draws the crowds, certainly. But it only interferes, in the last analysis, with the straightforward business of educating young men to be doctors. It would be better for the University, for the students, and for the country generally if that reputation didn't exist."

"But the amazing research work they carry on," I said.

"Necessary and valuable," he answered. "But consider this. In these times, we worship a god called Science. I think it is a very good god to worship. But we who stand in

the attitude of priests of the cult should take a leaf from older religions. We should keep most of the secret manifestations of the god within the temple and not broadcast to the mob every whimsical fancy he may display, every idle joke he plays. We do broadcast such things now. All it accomplishes is a general confusion, the confusion that always arises from a smattering of knowledge. The so-called medical discoveries that are announced in a constant stream do terrible harm to people. They are filled with false fears or false hopes from morning until night. If it continues, we'll have a complete population of bad neurotics in another generation or two."

· 2 ·

From Baltimore the road leads through gentle country, close down against the Chesapeake, with lilacs blooming and ancient manor houses built of ruddy brick hidden among the trees of the low hills. New Castle, in Delaware, is a collector's item out of Old America. Its quiet streets turn slowly past graceful, slumbering façades, and all the town seems faintly perplexed at the hum of motors racing through so urgently. People and town seem to fade evenly out of the feverish present and merge a little wistfully into forgotten days when the future of America was an alluring dream, pondered in formal sentences around a log fire, while periwigs nodded safely and ladies minded the proprieties of the weaker sex.

Then you move on toward Philadelphia. The past recedes into its customary place. The familiar harsh noises crowd the air and you are at home once more in time.

They have told you, no doubt, that Philadelphia is a drowsy place. Well, that belongs with the legend that all Chicago streets are bullet-swept. It simply is not true. On the other hand — and perhaps this is the basis for that impression of drowsiness — Philadelphia combines to a remarkable degree the features of Great Metropolis and of Cozy Town. That is to say, in its government, in the confusion of its teeming thoroughfares, in the wealth of public monuments and enterprises, it is beyond all doubt a very great, an impressive city. Yet most of its people, secure in their little garden suburbs, live homely, neighborly lives. There is no intoxication with the swirl of life in the midst of things; and at night, while the lamps gleam yellow behind curtained windows in a hundred little sub-cities, the downtown streets are almost completely deserted.

This quality, I think, does something to stifle the identity of Philadelphia as a powerful and stimulating nucleus, as other cities are likely to be. Its influence upon American life, even those waves of American life which break upon its very fringes, is very small. It is, I am inclined to believe, the least impressive great city in the world.

On the other hand, I found it altogether pleasant to get in an automobile downtown, and ride for long miles through the loveliest park I know, and sit down on a cool suburban porch while an amiable business man and his amiable wife put themselves out for my comfort. It was pleasant, too, when the neighbors dropped in after a while. The neighbors were young business men and their wives, and it struck me as an odd thing that they should be so fresh and eager, so full of mental energy, after a long day at the office. It seemed, indeed, that their real lives began only when they had put the city behind them and gone home to

their unpretentious settlement of homes under the trees of a broad street, and joined the sort of company that they liked.

We had a highball or two. We listened for a few minutes to some special news announcement over the radio, and then cut it off by general consent when one of the big cigarette programs began. A bridge game got under way in the small sun parlor that was green with ferns and hanging plants.

I found myself with two men and two women, sitting comfortably on the darkened porch. They were all Philadelphians born and bred. None of them had children. All of them confessed to a mild desire for children, and all agreed at once that they could afford no such luxury. One of the men was a building contractor in a small way and the other was in the wool business. But they would not talk shop. The wool man was nursing an idea, an idea, he said, that he had been carrying all day.

"We haven't any integrity," he said. "We have less conscience than any people in the world."

"Who?" asked one of the women.

"Americans," he answered.

"Why," she said, "I always thought we were the most honest people on earth. I've never even had a cook steal anything from me, and a month ago, when I left my pocketbook on the notions counter. . . ."

"Honest, yes," said the wool man. "Sometimes ridiculously honest and always ridiculously generous. But no integrity. Here's what I mean:

"I take my car to a garage to be repaired. Any garage. I know they are good mechanics. But I have no confidence at all in the work they are going to do for me. The car will

come back half-fixed. A lick-and-promise job. It will work, but it won't work exactly right."

"I had to take my vacuum cleaner back five times," said the woman, "and every time . . ."

"Exactly," said the wool man. "The owner of the garage, or the service station, or whatever it is, may lie awake at night planning contentment for his customers. 'Every Job a Perfect Job' and 'Workmanship Guaranteed' — he'll work out slogans and try his best to make them come true. But, at bottom, neither he nor the men working for him are capable of making them come true. I mean that they are not capable, morally. What he really wants is to make the customer *think* the job is perfectly done. He has no real, fundamental desire to do first-class work.

"That's just a simple example. It's true all down the line. Merchants and manufacturers and shipping people and builders — they are always making promises they have no real intention of keeping. Their whole desire is to *appear* honest, even to themselves. They have no moral necessity to *be* honest."

The contractor said, "Yes, that's America for you."

"And," said the wool man, "the thing that bothers me most is that we accept all that. We don't complain. We take it as a matter of course that nobody we deal with is really interested in giving us a square deal, good work, conscientious service. We know we can't believe what we see in the newspapers. We know that most of the advertising statements are hooey. We know that speedometers on automobiles are set up to indicate a speed ten or fifteen miles an hour above the real speed. But we just laugh about it. We never get mad or make any demands. That shows a lack of character. We haven't any national character."

The contractor said, "I know a man that manufactures buttons. He is violently opposed to Communism and has even made a speech or two about the Russian menace. But he got an order about two weeks ago for five hundred thousand Boy Scout buttons that were to have Soviet emblems in addition to the regular Boy Scout emblems. They were for young hopefuls in the radical elements of the coal and iron districts.

"Did he turn the order down on principle? He did not. He snapped it up. He said to me, 'Well, if I hadn't taken the order somebody else would. No use being a fanatic.' "

The other woman spoke. She was a quiet creature, still young, and I remember that she wore an amethyst brooch that William Penn admired at her ancestor's neck when Philadelphia was a village. "You are boring me a good deal," she said. "You are just like most people who go about disposing of America with such finality. You don't know what you're talking about.

"You haven't been anywhere. You don't read anything. You come upon some eternal defect in the human animal, and because you are so simple you decide grandly that it is unique in Americans. But most of the time, when you're criticising Americans, you are really criticising the human race. I suppose most Englishmen and Frenchmen and Italians think their garage men are incompetent rascals. All the lovely faults you've spoken of — they're really universal faults. You make me tired."

She leaned forward in her chair and suddenly she was quite angry. "You make me tired," she repeated. "And all the professional critics who write their opinions in the magazines, they make me tired too. Do you know what they really do? Well, they observe that the people around

them are pretty funny. They are stupid people, greedy and ill-mannered and ignorant and gabby. So the critics say, 'Oh, look! There's a fine discovery! Americans are stupid and greedy and ill-mannered and ignorant and gabby. They're incompetent. No integrity. No conscience. Oh — let's have fun!'

"Silly! Why, they're making the same old unpleasant discoveries about human beings that Shakespeare and Voltaire made — Zola and Goethe and Cervantes and all the rest of them. But our critics are naïve. They are parochial. They think only Americans could be like that. They have an enormous lot of fun laughing at American business men. Did you ever see an up-and-coming English business man? Did you ever talk over a deal with a French one? Or, Lord save my soul, a German one? Well, you have missed a right pretty experience, because I have seen them and I know.

"But you men think that all Englishmen live elegantly in the historic old Hall. You think all Frenchmen spend their lives knowing about wine and saying pretty things to the ladies. You think all Germans drink beer from morning to night and listen to Wagner and Beethoven. As a matter of fact, they make our business men look like children, like naïve and credulous and charitable little boys — as witness one wool exporter and one building contractor, here present!"

We filled our glasses. We talked about Prohibition for a while. Then we talked about politics. We all expressed our opinions on the elections, and how we intended to vote, but then we went into generalities — into the theory of government in the United States. Unhappily, I cannot report the conversation to you. It was a little too confused for me

to remember. The bridge players came out and contributed their observations, and they had very specific ideas as to what was wrong with the nation — but I can't seem to remember much of that, either.

Indeed, the whole talk turned into that vague, tangled argument which is the normal end of political discussion on American front porches. Nobody was interested in things as they are, but as they should be in some romantic, perfect State. To tell the truth, nobody knew much about the matter. None could name the members of the President's cabinet. None knew, even approximately, the amount of the deficit in the national treasury. We made a sort of game of questions like that, and the upshot was the disclosure of a comic ignorance concerning the affairs of state. In the end, everybody promised to be a better citizen — read up a little, get the straight of these involved matters — the country was going to pieces unless intelligent business men took more interest in the government.

· 3 ·

For the moment, we go past New York, past the welter of cities and towns and villages that lie upon the fringe of the metropolis. Later, we shall return. But now the road wanders among the soft and old and beautiful hills of Connecticut. We do not take the Boston Post Road for that, alas, has suffered a grievous change since Washington hurried his ragamuffin legions over its rutted face. The Post Road is now, I fancy, the most shockingly ugly road in all America, a march past billboards and hot-dog stands and filling stations and painful little settlements of houses. So we draw away from it and find instead the

lovely and quiet highways that wind up the valley of the Housatonic, that touch the murmurous back country where heather and daisies dress the slopes and peaceful white houses stand cleanly on the grass. Now and then we drop down to a city: Waterbury and Bridgeport, Hartford and New Haven.

I strolled through the rich splendor of the Harkness quadrangle at Yale. I set out to find a local product of that impressive environment, to discover what the quadrangle had done for him. And I found him only a few miles away, a young fellow written Bachelor of Arts on the college scroll only two years ago, married now to a young wife.

He was lean and good-looking. His grandfather, born in that same county, fought against my grandfather at New Market and Cedar Creek and Petersburg. His wife was the daughter of the school-teacher who had taught him his A B Cs. They lived in a small stone house, very old, which one of them had inherited somehow or another, and which both of them had labored over ceaselessly, changing it from an abandoned hut into a very pleasant dwelling in the midst of many flowers. He worked in a gasoline filling station in West Haven, days one week and nights the next. He earned, in this way, a little more than a hundred dollars a month, and they were expecting a baby. They seemed extraordinarily happy.

I said, "Doesn't it get you down, sometimes? You can't use quadratic surds and Beowulf and the Georgics to put five gallons of ethyl in somebody's tank. It seems a little incongruous. . . ."

His wife looked at me with amazingly clear brown eyes. "If I didn't know you were just leading him on to say some-

thing, I would think you were just silly. You know better than that."

But he spoke sharply. "What sort of business will ever give me any practical use of my education? Teaching, maybe, but I don't want to teach. And I don't want any practical use from my education. I don't want a six per cent. return on Chaucer. Whatever learning I've managed to pick up — and I'm going to keep on picking it up — is for my own private use. I'm going to be a business man, but I want something in my life besides business. If you'll look around a little, you will learn that a good many college men agree with me in that. They are becoming interested in education for its own sake. Not so many are boning away their college years on Commercial Administration and Business Practice."

I said, "How do you feel about business?"

"I like it," he said. "And I'll make a success at it too. Maybe it will be in the gasoline business, for all I know. Anyway, I'm not ashamed of earning my living in that filling station, and I'm working as hard at it as I know how."

He went on: He had no genuine prospects of any sort, except those that he could build for himself with his hands and his mind and his ambition. There was no money in his family or in his wife's family. It was a simple thing to observe that he was filled with genuine courage and genuine tenacity, after the fashion that we like to think of as typically American — typically Yankee.

We had a dinner that the girl cooked. It was good. There were no cocktails, and no highballs after dinner, because they could not afford such things and said so straightforwardly. We talked until bedtime about the fu-

ture of the country. They had neither patriotism nor fear. They simply had a feeling of certainty, hard to escape, that the country has not yet even begun its march toward preëminence.

I spent the night in their little spare bedroom. There was an owl outside the window. A gentle wind was in the pines. All the confusion and the enigma of the world seemed to reduce itself for a little time to the simplicity and directness and valor of these two who were so rich with hope.

· 4 ·

The marks of Time are more legibly written in Boston than in any other city of the Eastern shore. There, the slow pensive tale that is the unwinding of birth and change and birth again lies clear upon the pattern of existence. To-day is not a fresh adventure, born of the sun climbing out of the sea. It is an accumulation of ten thousand yesterdays. You wander across the Common, and you know that the Common is that same earth, that same rolling enclosure of black soil which once took the footprints of the Fathers. Stroll down Tremont Street or Beacon Street, and beneath the nervous chatter of hurrying footsteps on the pavement it is not difficult to imagine an undertone of slow, dignified footsteps, pacing out stately days. In many a narrow way, the faces of ancient houses look down and seem indulgent of the haste and the dim struggle that rings about their doorways.

The first rich Americans lived in Boston. You know that instinctively, even to-day. Old wealth stares from the windows, defending its old ways and its old rights, de-

fending its privilege to despise new wealth. Curiously enough, it does not seem to matter very greatly in Boston that the city fathers have changed from distinguished fellows, stern and wise and certain of their rectitude, to Irish politicians who are rude and clever. It does not seem to matter very greatly that the Athens of America has fallen, as we speak of culture, into something that resembles the nostalgic ruins of an older Athens. These things seem only the manifestations of a phase. So much has come and so much gone by — triumphs and surrenders have beat out their symmetrical cadence for so long — that peaks of splendor, shallows of desuetude, have the effect of figures in the design rather than ultimate definitions.

In all of Boston there is permanence and solidity. You are aware that all the streets, all the houses, are suffused with the powerful being of a city — a perdurable entity which cannot be very seriously affected by the people who chance to inhabit it to-day or to-morrow.

I went to a house on Beacon Hill. It faced upon a narrow private square, a very quiet sanctuary that was astonishingly close to the heart of town. The face of the house was old and it was not imposing in the common way. But inside its walls, suddenly a world away from the beat of traffic and the thrust of affairs, I became conscious of a warmth of living, an old grace that was framed in rooms of an extraordinarily contained loveliness. It was integral with the house itself. In that setting, even a sheepherder would catch some glimmer of the eternal decencies.

My host said (dinner was done, and we were through with coffee and brandy in his library, and we were in a drawing-room of pale green, and his wife was a lovely

picture in an armchair beside a lamp), "You see, we work in Boston. When I go to New York and Philadelphia and Chicago, I am always surprised to find so few executives working.

"My company is a hundred years old. I have been president of it for ten years. The first president always opened the mail in the morning, and so I do it now. All of it. I am there half an hour before the office is officially open, and I see all of the letters. As a consequence, I know everything that is happening in my business. I do not depend on my assistants to make up charts and briefs and synopses, to meet me in conference and tell me what my company is doing. I work all day. Take an hour for lunch. And quit at exactly five o'clock. When I come home, I am completely through with business until to-morrow."

I said to his wife, "Count one for your side."

She smiled. "I have a sister in New York," she said. "Her husband never really seems to get down to work until evening. He is home late every day; and even at dinner parties, even when he is among friends, the business goes on. I wouldn't like that."

He said, "We take business seriously, very seriously. Always have, in New England. But we take it as business, not as life itself, something to do as well as possible in the time allotted for it."

When he said "New England" I began to make up the stereotyped images: Old Puritan fathers plodding grimly through the snow and Puritan women plodding dutifully after them — hornbooks and Bibles, and all through the long evenings the Master of the family droning rhythmic, liquid verses out of Job and the horror of Revelation. But my host was talking about roulette. He had won a lot of

money at Monte Carlo, last trip over, and he did not like the play at Bradley's, in Palm Beach.

I said, when he was done with that, "What do you think it is that makes New England different from other parts of the country? There is something, there must be something. For even on my first day here, I can sense an unfamiliar atmosphere."

He said, "We are through, I think, with the grand American struggle, the swift American rush of ambition and business and play. We had our big expansions, all our wild fight for size and power a long time ago. We are a corner of America that has settled down, and given up the illusions, the golden dreams. We know that we will never be the biggest or the richest — or the superlative anything else. Let us say we have crystallized. We have taken our permanent form. We stopped running when all the rest of the country was just beginning to run, and settled into a walk. It is so much pleasanter walking, and so much easier to breathe."

I said, "Well, then — the old question — whither are we drifting?"

"We shall have to go ahead with industrialism," he said. "We shall have to carry the industrial age to flower: the age of high production, forced selling, machinery, dubious luxuries even for the poor. Everybody will have to have an automobile and a radio and an electric refrigerator and a home movie camera. We must not abandon this phase until it has reached all of its beautifully promised ends. We cannot have revolutions, or new schemes for the control of production, or Socialism, or any other deflection from the channel in which we have been moving.

"But then — I think — when our system of capitalism

and industrialism and mechanization has come to the bloom, when everybody has bought everything and the will to possess is satisfied, we shall make the slightly shocking discovery that the system is no good. What then? Nobody can tell. But it is our bounden duty to round out the cycle. It is very foolish now to talk about returning to the simple life, or doing anything but press the civilization we happen to have up to its highest peak. There is no good to be gained in talking about the good life, the fundamental simplicities, as long as the twenty-four-hour production of Fords can be doubled, or the Bessemer steel process made half as expensive, or the speed of airplanes increased. We are under the obligation to go ahead, to see what will happen when the thing we have started is carried to its last notch of perfection. Then the changes will occur of their own will."

"You are really pessimistic," I said.

"I am pessimistic of the phase in which we happen to have our lives," he said. "I am pessimistic for the simple reason that the phase is no good. It does not bear within it the power to make men happy, the power to fill human lives with satisfaction or a just reward for the pains of existence. It is nervous, swift, confusing. And men are not willing to beat their lives out forever in such an atmosphere. They have an instinctive desire for repose."

· 5 ·

I saw, not many days later, the spot where another man had thought of the good life, had written of it. The spot was not far from Boston. It was Walden Pond, where Thoreau preached the return to the earth and the sim-

plicities of birds and flowers, weaving and husbandry and slow delights. Two or three thousand little Italian boys and Jewish boys were out from the slums of Boston, splashing in Walden Pond. They beat its mirror surface to a white froth and the banks that came down so greenly were littered with the debris of their lunches.

I saw the industrial towns — Woonsocket and Lowell and Lawrence — filled to bursting with people. Along the streets there was a clamor of foreign tongues, and it was difficult to catch a single word of English. Yet, there is no doubt that these are American towns, for all their resemblance to some gloomy factory center out of Europe. They are, perhaps, the very key to that American industrialism which so fascinated my Boston friend. And they were such a few miles from the place where all America began.

I saw that place; the village green at Lexington. It was utterly silent and utterly empty under the late afternoon sun. All around its edge was a fringe of ancient white houses, and the elms were very tall. There, at the apex of the triangle, the British platoons once stood, very fine with their scarlet coats and tall black busbies and polished muskets. And the muskets had been lifted. . . .

I saw the bridge at Concord. It was deserted, too, but ghostlike forms seemed to move about: British soldiers again, wooden-faced and strong with duty — and, facing them from the other end of the bridge, farmer boys intoxicated with the wine of liberty. Faintly, I caught the echo in those low hills of the shot heard 'round the world. And on the horizon the smoke of the factories at Boston and Lowell and Lawrence was only an incongruous smudge.

In that silent place, the golden dream of those forgotten, embattled farmers seemed to knock upon the mind.

· 6 ·

Far back among the little hills of New Hampshire, with the mountains towering in the distance, I talked to a "Down East" farmer. He sat in a low room, the living room of his small, weather-beaten cottage, and the fire burned brightly for the air was sharp with cold. He might have been one of those very farmer boys who stood facing the soldiers at Concord, grown older, for in his face and his manner, his way of speech and the deliberate flow of his thinking there was a deep assurance that had nothing of vanity in it, a solidity that could not be budged for all the changes of a tempestuous world. His wife sat by, knitting and listening to him talk. Neither of them appeared the least disturbed, either with interest or vexation, at the presence of a stranger, although strangers must have been rare indeed in that remote place.

He had a farm of ninety acres. Sixty acres of it was in woodland and the rest in grubby little fields which seemed to begrudge the trifling fruits they were forced to give up. Out of this farm, he earned virtually no money. No more than a hundred dollars of actual currency passed through his hands in an ordinary year. But that served his needs. For he and his wife had learned all the thrifty ingenuity of the poor. And they produced their own food, their own firewood. The luxuries which are a commonplace to the ordinary factory worker were virtually unknown to them. Neither had ridden in an automobile more than once or twice. Nobody in all the neighborhood had a radio set.

They had seen, together, one moving picture in all their lives.

But their happiness had its roots in their firm sense of righteousness. They were upright folk, and they knew it, and this knowledge sustained them through the worst winter storms, the worst need of the bad years.

"I don't know," said the man, "what the rest of the country may be like. Seems to me, from what I read, that they are downright panicky about the way things are going. That's because they haven't got anything to fall back on."

I said, "What do you fall back on?"

He said, "God, in the first place. And then work. And faith."

"Faith in yourself, you mean?"

"Yes, and in the missus, in my friends, and the Government of the United States."

"You think it is a good government?"

He stared at me. "Who's been doubting it?" he asked.

"Some people . . ." I said vaguely.

"Then those people better leave here."

"You are happy?" I asked.

"Well, now," he said, "some people think too much about being happy. I don't know if too much happiness is good for folks. It takes a lot of the other to make a man amount to something. I work my fields, and pay my debts, and when there ain't anything to eat but potatoes I just eat potatoes. Maybe you don't call that being happy. I dunno. I never gave much mind to happiness, one way or t'other. There's little sense in yearning after something you can't have, and there's little sense in complaining about what you've got. I never knew any rich men. We

don't have 'em in these parts. But I don't guess they're so very much happier than I am.

"Everybody I know is poor. I don't know any that's whining about it."

I told him something about the industrial workers of the iron district and the farmers of the middle plains. I told him a little about the South and about New York. He was interested, but he was not deeply impressed.

"All of 'em will be better off," he said, "when they get down to bed rock and quit all this agitating. They'll be better off when they learn that a man's place is in his own house, on his own land, raising the food for his own table and the wood for his own fire — asking no favors and worshipping God according to his own lights."

VIII

New York

I SIT here at my desk, wishing to tell you about New York. That is almost as ambitious as if I were to say, "I will tell you about life." For, within the arc of the metropolis, there are ten million human beings, and with so many living all together you may be sure that there are no extremities of depravity and of nobility which are not reached, no extremities of ignorance and wisdom, of love and hate, poverty and wealth. Beauty and ugliness touch their apogee magnificence and squalor, in this loud new city at the edge of the sea.

I retreat, alas, before so monstrous an undertaking, for there are limits to all presumption. I search for a device which will let me escape my impossible task and yet suggest to you a little of the city that is New York. At last it comes to me. I will tell you how one New Yorker lives — the New Yorker about whom I know the most — myself.

My home is in an apartment house in East Sixty-Eighth Street, very close to the center of Manhattan, though it is not a fashionable address at all. Next door to

me there is a small church built by German Lutherans, who fill the air with their guttural speech on bright Sunday mornings — who have a fine time singing thunderous old German hymns at their weddings and funerals. On the other side, a Bohemian cobbler has a musty little window full of shoes that he has repaired. Whenever I go out, I see his little gnome of a hunchback wife herding her children about the stoop of the shoe shop and crying petulantly to them. A few steps away is First Avenue, full of little shops that sell very cheaply to the Hungarians and Czechs and Jugo-Slavs who live in the flats above them.

My apartment has a sunny living room. It has the smallest possible dining alcove and the smallest possible kitchen. There are two bedrooms and two baths. The furniture is an accumulation from bad times and good times. We cherish that from the good times because we think it is comfortable and even charming. We cherish the relics of the bad times because they are souvenirs of our early struggles.

For this apartment I pay a monthly rent of two hundred dollars. I keep my modest automobile in a garage two blocks away, and that costs an additional thirty-five dollars every month.

The establishment consists of me and my wife and my small daughter, who was born after ten years of marriage because we could not afford her until then. Every morning at eight o'clock a Negro servant comes down from Harlem to our apartment. She goes back after dinner, except on evenings when we are going out. Then, we have to persuade her to stay with the child. We pay her twenty-two dollars a week and my wife has taught her to cook rather well.

We are only a few blocks from Central Park, which is

a very beautiful place, never crowded except on Sundays, and every morning the child is taken there to play. She is a little more than three years old and has never played with other children. None of our friends have youngsters of her age. And in New York the children who meet each other in the parks and the streets stand very much on their dignity. They do not strike up an acquaintance. This is largely due to the nurses, who are always suspicious of disease or bad manners in every charge except their own.

All of this means, of course, that our daughter must go to school next year — kindergarten to begin with. It must be a private school, one of four or five that are approved, for I am not quite democratic enough after all to put her in the public school with the rabble of New York's children: white and black and yellow and dirty gray. Even if I were, my friends would think it a foolish and penurious thing to do. The school will cost about three hundred dollars the first year and the cost will go up after that.

We have a very large number of friends and acquaintances, and they are in almost every station of life. Most of them, naturally enough because of my trade, are somehow connected with the business of writing or publishing. A few of them, absurd as it is, go the length of living in Greenwich Village. But we know, also, many business men and business women, several doctors and lawyers, a few brokers and bankers, some clerks and mechanics, and one or two simple loafers. Also, of course, the wives of these fellows.

Our friends and acquaintances fall into three or four groups, separated to the point that they hardly know of each other's existence at all. When we are inviting guests

to the apartment, we never mix the groups up. They would bore each other and, more important, they would bore us with their honest incompatibility. This arrangement, which is practiced by most New Yorkers of any seasoning, is altogether satisfactory. It gives to our lives an excellent variety of human contact and stimulation and amusement; it prevents us from becoming fed up with the constant sight of the same old faces and the constant echo of the same old opinions; it permits us to escape those crushing demands in the name of friendship which are the penalty for too much intimacy and too much neighborly concern. In short, it enables us to order the course of our own existence, to have privacy when we want it and companionship when we want it.

This, perhaps, is selfish. Well, the first and best lesson to be gained from living in New York is a decent selfishness. Without such a thing, the individual quickly loses the outlines which distinguish him from the rushing mass. He is sucked into a maelstrom as impersonal as a set of population figures, and he simply drifts with the ten millions — downtown in the morning, uptown at night, with the roar of the subway and the elevated and the radio loud-speaker always in his ears.

As it is, we happen to live quite placidly. We do not rush about very much. We rarely hurry to anything. People who visit us from other cities are frequently astonished at the tameness of our lives and wonder that we can be contented to stay at home when, in their own phrase, "so much is going on all the time." To tell the truth, we have seen most of those things that are going on. Few of them are worth a second look. They are only the garish superstructure of a city. Once is enough for Harlem and the

night clubs and most of the other tub-thumping amusement devices.

My wife does not belong to any clubs or circles. Nearly all her friends are also my friends. I belong to one club, an extremely pleasant one, but I do not go there so very often.

Our chief amusement is just sitting in our living room or in some friend's living room and talking. All of us think it is rather good talk. All of us think that our wheezes are amusing and our opinions fairly sound. Sometimes we play bridge for a modest penny a point. Sometimes we play backgammon for a dollar a game. But neither ourselves nor our friends take these diversions very seriously. All of us prefer conversation.

The drinking, for the most part, is quite temperate. We always have cocktails before dinner whether we are at home or out — our bootlegger is a former Stutz dealer from Oakland, California — and we generally have one or two highballs after dinner, rarely more. Once or twice a week we go to a favorite speak-easy for dinner.

We go to the speak-easy chiefly because the food is very fine there and the decorations attractive. Virtually all of the good cooking in New York, nowadays, is to be found in the thirty thousand speak-easies, and they are the center of life outside the home. There is a very simple reason for the excellence of the food. The chefs, nearly all Frenchmen, do not have to cook vast quantities of their dishes and they do not have to make a profit on the kitchen. The profit is made at the bar, just as in the distinguished hotels and restaurants of other days.

We usually encounter a friend or two at the speak-easy. We have a few cocktails, and a good dinner, and a glass of old brandy, and talk the evening out. Sometimes we will

be disturbed by a drunk, back at the bar, but if he gets too full he is required to leave. The proprietors, good Italian family men both of them, with wives and children in Brooklyn, are deeply upset by such an occurrence and always come to our table to apologize. They protest that it is their dream to conduct the establishment quietly and with a little touch of elegance, and indeed they manage very well at it — as do most who run the good speak-easies. More than once, I have seen men and women with their small sons at Mino's for luncheon — the small sons sipping their ginger ale without the least self-consciousness while their parents drink Martinis or old-fashioned cocktails.

I do not know a single person in New York who does not, more or less often, go to such a place as Mino's. The liquors are good, even if they are rather expensive. The quality of the wines is based, quite honestly, upon the axiom that an American doesn't know a good wine, even when he has it. There is not the faintest suggestion of the vulgarity of the old-time barroom. And finally, there is no more comfortable, amiable place for a few friends to get together for a pleasant evening.

On very rare occasions, I go to one of the smart speak-easies where the celebrities gather. But it is not much fun. The crowds are thick, the liquor is second-rate, and there is a rather terrible undertone of whispering and pointing — "There's B, right over there behind that woman in red. See? Right *there!*" And B, and all of the other celebrities, talking very loudly, laughing boisterously, making it a shade too plain that they are not aware of the pointing fingers. Then C comes in, a little more than nonchalant, waving at everybody he knows, joining up with some gay circle of pals at a round table in the corner, secretly cursing

the red-haired movie star in ermine coat who came in just behind him and took all the edge off his entrance.

We do not go to the theater very often. I do not know exactly why, except that perhaps we saw too much of it in our early New York years. Or it may be that all the plays with the exception of a few hits are desperately dull and bad, and it is difficult to get tickets for the hits without buying far in advance. I have the usual antipathy of New Yorkers toward planning anything very far ahead of time, and thus we frequently miss even the good plays.

We go to perhaps two moving-picture shows a year. I do not know exactly why we do not see more, because we generally have a good time when we do go, even if all the amusement comes from laughing at Hollywood ineptitude.

It is only when we set out for the theater or the movies that we see Broadway — say once in two months. We always enjoy our glimpse of it, though it would never occur to us to go to the bright thoroughfare for the simple purpose of looking at it. The surge and glitter of Times Square, and its rushing noises, are mildly exciting. But the incredible hordes of people are enervating. If there were a single spot of repose on Broadway, one little point where the tides eddy to a calm, giving an opportunity to rest and watch the seething panorama, it would be very fine. But there is no such point, nothing to compare with the European cafés or the oddly secluded little street-islands of London. Everything is movement, and you are forced either to keep walking or to pause at the curb and be jostled by urgent people, frowning their way through an evening's amusement. It is well enough to watch the evolutions of a million midges as they stream through a bright light, but it is a trifle dispiriting to be one of the midges yourself.

Most of us, in New York, go to rather extreme lengths to avoid crowds. Most of us deplore the fact that there are so many people, and I never heard a New Yorker refer with any pride to the figures of the census takers. Viewed critically, the New York crowds are no worse than the crowds of other great cities. They are not particularly rude. They are for the most part amiable and they are always docile, doing whatever the signs tell them to do and making intelligent concessions to the great inconveniences which arise from the need of so many individuals to get quickly to so many places. It is simply the ceaseless flood of humanity that grates against the nerves — the ceaseless jostle and hurry along the sidewalks and the ceaseless chatter of inane voices saying inane things. For these reasons, we avoid the streets like the plague in the morning when people are going to work, and in the evening when they are going home.

Once a year I go to Coney Island, for the naïve reason that it amuses me to ride the shoot-the-chutes and hear the chant of the ballyhoo men. We generally see two or three football games in the autumn, journeying down to Princeton or up to New Haven. We also go through terrible inconveniences of transportation to see the tennis finals at Forest Hills and the famous polo matches at Meadowbrook.

Neither of us has ever been to a lecture. We do not have a radio. I have been to Brooklyn only twice in thirteen years, though on very hot summer nights we used to ride the ferry back and forth for hours between the Battery and Staten Island. Neither of us has visited the Statue of Liberty or Grant's Tomb or the top of the Empire Building, and our periodic visits to the Metropolitan

Museum of Art leave us so completely weary that we swear we will never go again.

We do not go to church. Among all the people of our acquaintance there are only three or four who have not surrendered their early religious beliefs, and these are Roman Catholics who are unostentatious but persistent in their attendance upon early Masses and their devotion to ancient gods.

In the summer we go to the country, locking up the apartment on the first of June and returning to it on the first of October. For the past few years we have rented a house on Long Island, nearly eighty miles from the city. It is extremely quiet there. Only a few New Yorkers will come so far and consequently there are few parties, few examples of that odd, half-fictional thing called Long Island life. But the swimming is good. The low hills that come down to the clear waters of the Sound are covered with fine trees and with many flowers. It is always cool there.

We have out for the week-ends those friends whose work keeps them fast to the city, although occasionally we abandon our house from Friday until Monday and visit somebody on the Island, or across the Sound in Connecticut, or far away in New Jersey. We always lug an enormous number of books to the country when we go in June, determined to get a lot of reading done, reading we have meant to do for months. We always bring the load of books back, untouched. For reasons that are completely elusive, we never get around to them.

There, then, is the basic physical pattern of one New Yorker's existence. Most of the people I know live quite as simply. Perhaps I have a little more leisure than most

of my friends, for my day's work is usually done by luncheon time. But they do not work very hard. Nobody in all my acquaintance really spends his full energies on toil of any sort.

Most visitors to New York are misled by the intense clamor and the violent activity of the multitude into the belief that the individuals of the hive are clamorous and violently active — that, because the whole is a terribly strenuous thing, the parts must also be strenuous. But you perceive the difference. Even the smallest tremor of an individual, multiplied by ten millions, becomes a convulsion. Of course there are many, newcomers to the city for the most part, who have conceived the notion that to be New Yorkers truly they must be in a constant state of agitation. But that is wearing on the body and the spirit. Soon they learn the secrets of the restrained life, even in so unrestrained a city. They learn how to stroll through the streets and the parks, instead of running. They learn that most of the wild excitements of the metropolis are not pleasant, but simply exhausting. And if they are wise, they settle at last into a peaceful routine.

Most of the ten millions, obviously, are poor. They have a terrible struggle for existence. They could live, in return for the same amount of toil, more decently and more comfortably in almost any other part of the country. But they do not go away. I have often wondered why and I have tried to find out why.

I remember a fellow, a quiet young man with a quiet young wife, who gave up a good job in some Middle Western town and moved to New York. He had saved a handful of money for the venture and he had added to it by selling the furniture in his small rented bungalow in a

respectable suburb. Coming to the city, he hunted desperately to find work and indeed found it after a few weeks. It paid him about the same salary he had earned at home. Now he was a New Yorker.

He lived in lower Manhattan, in an old dingy house that had been converted into makeshift apartments. He lived on the top floor, a long walk up creaking stairs, past gloomy walls and the gloomy faces of his neighbors who stamped in and out, all night and all day. His front windows looked into the front windows of an Italian laborer, twenty feet away across the street. His back windows looked into a forbidding courtyard that was alive at night with screaming cats. His wife had bought odds and ends of furniture on the installment plan, but they did not have to live with it very much, for they rarely spent an evening in their home. The air was too full of the bedlam of radio music and shouting children and thunderous motor trucks. They generally went to a moving-picture theater and saw the identical film that was showing in their neighborhood playhouse back home.

For this residence, he paid nearly a third of his income. It was utterly uncomfortable, sordid, and in any place other than New York it would have made a revolutionist of him. But he was happy and his wife was happy. "Oh," they said to me, "we're crazy about New York. Dreamed all our lives of coming here to settle. Wouldn't go back for a million."

I asked them why, but they had great difficulty in answering. I said, "Is it business? Do you think there is a better chance of becoming rich here?"

"No," they said. His chances were no better with the New York firm than with the Middle Western firm.

"Is it amusement you come for? Theaters and music and art galleries — things like that?"

Not exactly. They could not afford the theater, anyway.

"To be near celebrated people, then? To be in the shadow of the big shots — in the town where the big news is made and the mighty events happen?"

Oh, no. Hardly that.

"Well, in Heaven's name, what?"

Freedom, they said. But freedom from what bonds and freedom to gain what ends they could not say at once. What freedom was vouchsafed them in a sordid New York walk-up that was denied them in a neat white bungalow, they were quite unable to define for a long while. But gradually it became a little clear. They came to New York and put up with its miseries to escape something, rather than to attain something: to escape the kindly, well-meant bondage of parents and uncles and aunts; to escape, above all, the grubby little certainties of existence — the certainty that Monday would be wash day and Tuesday ironing day, that the Lodge would meet on Friday night and the Ladies' Auxiliary on Saturday afternoon, that the gentle old preacher would lay down for them on Sunday morning a mild and amiable pattern for existence, the certainty that the young fellow would be promoted when the man above him died. These things, these small securities, had palled upon their youth and their hunger for living. And so they had come to New York, as if New York were a sea of adventure, not a goal to be attained.

There are thousands and thousands like them. Most of them manage to get together with their kind by some devious means or another, and have long powwows over bathtub gin about their freedom, the wide liberty of life

in the metropolis. They laugh with scornful contempt at the little towns they have left behind, the narrowness of thought in those towns and the stupefying conventions. But, to tell the truth, they are a moral lot for the most part, these dear, penniless, free souls of New York: moral, and full of old-fashioned decencies, and in their secret souls a little wistful. For they really have not the faintest notion what to do with all their freedom save talk about it.

We do not care very much about politics in New York. Most of us vote, rather automatically, for the Tammany Hall which gives us efficient, smooth, outrageously expensive government. We are afraid that any other set of political gentlemen might give us the outrageously expensive government without the efficiency and without the smoothness. Our newspapers cry with righteous indignation over the graft and the dishonor in public office, but it does not excite us overmuch. We take such things for granted just as they are taken for granted in every other city of America, in every other manifestation of the American government system.

The police are courteous and intelligent, and they accept the fact that they are public servants, not avenging angels — a thing which distinguishes them from most American policemen. The streets are all well paved. The fire department and the public hospitals are excellently managed. Nobody clubs you on the head for taking a drink or falling in love with your neighbor's daughter, and you can go to sleep at night peaceful in the knowledge that no violent wave of reform will disturb your faintly sinful existence before you awake.

In short, our government is one of extreme liberality, based upon the theory that a man can do whatever he likes

as long as he does not make himself a nuisance to his fellows. I suppose I have heard policemen and judges and fellows in authority say at least a hundred times, "Live and let live — " and that would make a very sound motto for the city's great seal, since it is in reality the basic theory upon which all of us work.

We who live in New York encounter virtually none of the dark vice which seems, to the rest of the country, so marked a characteristic of our city. I like, for example, to play a little piker's game of roulette now and then. I have played, lately, in Chicago, Butte, New Orleans, Palm Beach and Key West, and some of these days I would like to play at French Lick, Indiana, for I have heard that it is a charming place. But I give you my word that I do not know of a single gambling hell in all New York. Also, though I am neither deformed nor bearded, I will swear that I have never been accosted on the streets of New York by a woman — and I would be utterly at sea if a visitor to the city in search of such companionship asked my advice.

Therefore, as you may see, we have very little to make us think of our municipal government one way or another, save for the newspaper stories that tell the millions stolen every year. Being Americans, like the rest of you, it does not stir our indignation when politicians steal millions. We do not particularly like our city, but on the other hand we do not dislike it. And under the circumstances most of us feel that it would be a little silly to go changing things.

It is now my obligation, I suppose, to give some accounting for my own deliberate choice of New York as a place to live. It happens that because of my trade I do not have to live there. Yet I would rather call New York home than any other spot in the world. I am not in the least patriotic

about the city, nor do I know one soul who is. I would not bother to say one word in defense of it, even in the face of the most violent and unreasonable attacks. I hate its crowds, its difficulties of transportation, its useless and shocking noise. I dislike the faces of most of the people I see in the streets, for they are stupid and ugly faces, or alien and acquisitive faces. I hate the pretensions of the *nouveau riche* and the professional whimperings of the professional poor. I hate, above all, the presumptuous vanity of those who call themselves sophisticates, for they are noisy little people and they are empty and they are ubiquitous.

But New York feeds my spirit in a fashion that no other city in the country could do. It gives me a lift and a stimulation; and when, after a long absence, I am drawing near to it again, I am filled with eagerness to walk its streets, to recognize the familiar contours, even to hear the harsh careless speech along the curbstone.

In all its countless aspects, the surge of beauty is there, and now, as I am thinking of its streets and towers, a hundred priceless images come to the mind. I remember once, when I was a newspaper reporter, I went down the bay in a cutter before dawn to meet the English novelist, Joseph Conrad. We boarded his ship in the darkness, and met him, and stood with him on the bridge as the slow trip up the harbor to the dock began. He had been to many places in the world and seen many cities. He was no longer young, and this was his first visit to New York — or the first visit since he was a boy. His eyes were gleaming with eagerness as he stared into the gray haze ahead, and his small beard was pointed almost straight forward. After a time, the first streak of the sunrise showed through the mists that hung over the water. It was gray at first, then

pink, then a golden-rose. The ship moved steadily toward the city in that ineffable radiance — and suddenly, across the wide water, it was there. The city was there.

We saw a piling up of golden towers. Their feet were lost in the smoky mists and their peaks seemed to melt into the pale transparent blue of the morning sky. It was like a fairy city that might be swept suddenly away if one breathed too deeply. I turned to look at Joseph Conrad, and the tears were coming out of his eyes, running down his face and hanging in his small beard. He said, almost inaudibly, "Unspeakable — unspeakable — " and none of us uttered a word until the ship was lying at her pier.

There have been many times when New York has put such an enchantment upon me. Its moods change endlessly from gaudy to somber, from an almost ethereal lightness to a crushing weight of doom. But the splendor never fails, the miracle of man's ingenuity in the building of a city never diminishes. The sense of imperturbable majesty endures.

The city provides a stimulus that is an unfailing whip to the spirits and to the mind. Yet, in one way or another, that stimulus is a difficult thing to catch neatly into words.

. . . Throughout all New York the sense of power beats with an unremitting pulse: the thrust and strain of millions of human lives, the beat of a million machines. It is hard indeed to doubt the purposefulness of existence when such incalculable energies are flowing all about you to assuage the discomforts of existence, to gain disputed goals whether they be fair or foul, to write deeply upon the face of time.

That is one stimulus: the tom-tom beat of effort, the rhythm of immeasurable strife.

. . . Whatever sort of mind you have, there are better

minds. Whatever craft you possess there are more skillful hands. The minds strike incessantly against your mind and goad it to resources wholly unsuspected. The hands are willing to teach.

That is another stimulus.

. . . In all the confusion of living, the blundering and the collision of ten million lives at cross currents, there is an utter compulsion to work out and to practice an individual scheme of life. Neither habits nor philosophies, beliefs nor customs are handed out by tradition or the fiat of convention. A million philosophies and habits and beliefs and customs clamor for their devotees, and any way of life is possible. Therefore it is necessary for each one to solve his own puzzle, straighten his own tangled threads. There can be no lethargy in the seeking after an approach to life, a way to live.

That is another kind of stimulus.

So, then, I live in New York. I find it amusing and enchantingly beautiful and stimulating — noisy, cursed with an abominable climate, crowded with perfectly terrible people. I would not trade it for the loveliest vale in all of Arcady. I would not leave it, even to join the lotus eaters.

IX

The Cast Account

IF success has fallen to my lot even slightly in this writing, then I have given to you a sense of the myriad individual lives following their diverse threads from day to day in this country of yours. Only a few of the threads have been picked up and inspected and the inspection, unhappily, could last for but a moment. Yet I may have suggested, as I set out to do, that there are a hundred and twenty million such individuals filling out the whole of our nationality — a hundred and twenty million such threads weaving incessantly at the pattern of our national destiny. Whatever America may be, now or to-morrow, it must reflect in explicit fashion the character and the manners, the intellect and the ideals of its millions — the millions who seem so impersonal, so very much like insensate pawns in the game, when they are viewed through the dim illumination of census bureau statistics.

I think, then, it may be possible to reverse for a moment the technique of our inquiry into the nature of the American people. Having looked at the trees in the effort

to understand the forest, we might now glance at the forest, knowing it to be simply an accumulation of trees.

Several broad manifestations of the national character come to the mind at once. Among them are the press, the church, and the implications of culture as encountered in books, pictures, music and the theater. The press is no doubt the most revealing of all, for it touches every individual and it reflects every individual, and it is astonishingly uniform throughout the country. The newspapers of Maine are virtually indistinguishable from the newspapers of Florida or Montana or Nebraska. Indeed, a very large part of the material in all the papers of America on any given day is identical, since it is sent out from central syndicates — not only the familiar comic strips and fashion drawings and humorous columns, but editorials and political cartoons as well. There are, in New York, dozens of men who work every day at the hollow task of providing opinions and comments upon national affairs, keeping the fact constantly in mind that they must not offend their clients — the newspaper publishers — who may be of a dozen political and social complexions.

This axiom, the axiom of inoffensiveness, is not of course confined to the newspapers which buy their editorials in lots of a hundred. It applies equally to the newspapers which distill their own opinions upon current events. The old wheeze to the effect that the man-eating shark was the only thing which could be attacked with any vigor in the American press has become a wheeze no longer but virtually a rule, and the exceptions proving the rule are pitifully few. This is due to the very simple fact that American newspapers are commercial enterprises. Of itself, that is certainly no reflection upon them. The re-

flection comes indirectly from the supposition, kept alive by newspaper proprietors and readers alike, that the press is something more than a commercial institution. But the reading of newspapers in all the cities of America makes it very plain that the press assumes to itself no real responsibility for the social and political health of the nation — no feeling for leadership, either good or bad. It has embraced the idea that the daily issue is simply and purely an article for sale, a piece of merchandise, and any departure from the standard of amiability that is touched with dramatic urgency is regarded as a flaw in the package. Of course, now and again the amiability disappears for a time. But only for the man-eating shark: the political villain who has plainly earned the hatred of everybody, Catholics and Protestants and Jews, black and white and yellow, rich and poor. Only for the obvious evil, which is plainly beyond the limits of controversy.

As for the matter of ethics, I do not believe that there are more than a dozen newspapers in the country which cannot be persuaded by their advertisers to print, or not to print as the case may be, a given editorial, or a given cartoon, or a given article in the news columns. I do not believe that there are more than a dozen advertisers in the country who consider this an improper state of affairs.

The result, of course, is cumulative in its demoralization of the wonted influence of newspapers. Let us suppose, for example, that I am an operator of taxicabs on a large scale. I become aware of a fight for lower taxi rates being waged in the editorial columns of the local journal. I buy ten full pages of advertising space and request that the campaign cease at once. It ceases. And suppose that I, a month later, become aware of a similar campaign against

the ten-cent loaf of bread: and see full-page bread advertisements appear: and see the crusade suddenly abandoned. I know perfectly well what sort of conference has gone on in the business offices of that particular newspaper.

Enough people have worked such influence upon the press already to break down its authority and its reputation for integrity. All who have turned the tricks in their own selfish behalf know that others are doing the same thing, and the result is a sophistication concerning the ways of the press which robs it rather completely of any claim to impregnable honor or pure ideals.

Thus it has come to an approximation of moral bankruptcy, in that it is a moral force merely by the accident of the news it prints rather than the design of its several proprietors, and all of us are aware that the front-page news columns of our papers are not excessively elevating. It required only the tragedy of the Lindbergh kidnapping case to make clear the whole-hearted willingness of the press to surrender all restraint, all pretensions of good taste, indeed all decency in a welter of sensational headlines. Many of those headlines and the stories under them — the most shocking of all in fact, such as "Lindy Faints at Bier" — were utterly without foundation in truth. And as we have come to suspect the nobility of aim behind the editorials, so we have learned to suspect always the facts behind statements that are labelled news.

Yet it is the somewhat sad case — sad, at least, from the viewpoint of the editors — that such a suspicion is not really justified in the matter of news. Most of the news in the papers is true. Most of it is gathered with care by competent men. No other newspapers in the world, and I do

not except the great London journals, print so much news or present it with such freedom from bias. We can at least be sure, in America, that we receive every day a reasonably clear account of what is going on in the world.

And so we come to an inference concerning the press — an inference which may be tentatively generalized so that it will apply, perhaps, to many other aspects of American life: The press is competent, efficient, clever — and it is without ideal, without basic virtue, without the will to be right in its thinking or bold in its expression of thought.

On the other hand, we are vouchsafed now and then a vague hint that the people are better than their press, that it does not fairly represent them. I think, now, of the daily column written by Walter Lippmann. In all the tumbled production of columns, the Brisbanes and the Winchells and the O. O. McIntyres, it is a little remarkable to find Lippmann the most widely read and the most frequently discussed, for he is serious to the point of downright coldness and he makes no concessions whatever to the supposed ignorance of his audience. The immense success which his writings in the press have enjoyed was startling to editors all over the country. They had no notion that their readers would take to such earnest fare — for, I think, they have constantly underrated the intelligence and the tastes of ordinary men in America.

Throughout the country I found people taking their newspaper as a daily magazine, and they were invariably astonished at my suggestion that they might be gathering ideas or opinions from the press — with the exception of occasional special contributions such as those of Lippmann. Where, I asked them, did they acquire their ideas, their

opinions? They did not know. I gained the impression that such things came to them dimly by a process of natural accretion: that no man really believed what any other man had to say, that opinions and beliefs grew from some internal synthesis, out of a woefully small store of information.

· 2 ·

The church is a rather difficult thing to observe. Its influence upon the inner lives of men has always been, in modern times, a subtle and intangible thing. Of course it is easy enough to talk to preachers, but they have a perfectly natural bias. And it would never do to stare at the outlandish pranks of the Methodist Board of Morals or the Watch and Ward Society or the Bishop Cannons of the world, and call that the influence of the church.

I fell back upon the simple device of going to the churches. With a very few exceptions, the Protestant churches were almost empty, and the sermons grew waspish in contemplation of the vacant benches. The Catholic churches were moderately well attended. The Jewish churches were very well attended. With an unanimity which was quite astonishing, the Protestant ministers were teaching ethics rather than religion. They had abandoned the dogmas and the creeds. They were a trifle urgently modern. They were rationalizing the eternal virtues in a rather strange effort to make them attractive.

The Catholics were demonstrating once again their amazing flexibility under the stress of changing times. I am not very well acquainted with the intricacies of the Roman ritual, but I know that I was absorbed with the ingenuity which can speak in modern terms and yet give

the impression that no word, no belief, no dogma has changed a jot since the world began.

I asked hundreds of people, from coal miners who were hungry to bankers and business men and shopgirls and housewives, what they were getting from their religion in these disturbed times. Only one man said that his church, his God, was a prop to him. He was sincere and I believed him. The others too were sincere and I believed them. Nowhere did I encounter a genuine religious feeling. Everywhere I encountered skepticism, distrust, or amusement at the beliefs of our fathers. And so I came to the conclusion that Christianity is hardly to be considered at all as a force in American life, in directing its current or its desires.

Whether it is in relation to this waning of Christianity I do not know, but the fact is very clear that the ancient virtues are no longer taught in our country. Children are not reared to the stern chant of goodness. They climb haphazardly into adult life. The fetish is expression, the breaking down of hampering restraint, and the more easily assimilated doctrines of psychoanalysts. They are not immoral. They are simply without morals, save for those instinctive and defensive morals which survive unconsciously from more harshly ordered generations.

· 3 ·

All over America, in the great cities and the towns and the remotest corners of the land, there is an intense eagerness to embrace the amenities of art. The urge is a vital one. It is not an escape mechanism. It is not a by-end of the culture craze. It is a very genuine movement, instinctive

for the most part, toward the enrichment of existence, toward finding a satisfying approach to life.

To me, it made very little difference that most of the painting and most of the writing was bad. That is a very natural thing. When a million people are painting and writing, in any age and any land, most of it will be bad. The ability to produce good painting and good writing is a gift that the gods have always dealt out stingily. But the million who are pursuing their little labors with the arts make the field fertile for the few among them whom the gods have favored. In America, in our time, it is utterly inconceivable that a good artist of any sort should be checked in his aims; it is utterly inconceivable that a good artist should languish for want of an audience.

I cannot think of a time or a place in all history wherein so few restraints, so few rules, were laid upon creative artists. I cannot think of a time or place wherein the rewards were so certain. Indeed, if there is a hazard in being an artist, American, in our times, it is the very certainty of the rewards and their inordinate richness. Let a man but show his head among the ranks of the talented and he is made giddy by the money and the fame that are showered upon him. The fleshpots yawn — specifically, the fleshpots of Hollywood — and it is a sturdy fellow indeed who can resist them and continue the pursuit of those dreams which are most particularly nourished by the frugal life.

Yet, it can at least be reported that the hazard is not a blind one. There is a rapidly growing tendency among artists nowadays to go away from New York, to recognize the temptations of Hollywood and deliberately forswear them. For the first time in our history, we have writers and painters, musicians and sculptors and architects scat-

tered generally over the country. The old concentration in the drawing-rooms of Boston and Philadelphia and New York — as deadly a hazard in its day as Hollywood is now — is gone, or at least it is going.

Thus we shall begin, I think, to escape that imitativeness, that slavish attachment to the mode, which has always hounded artists. And we shall, perhaps, bring to flower the undisputed vigor and freshness which American art already has displayed.

· 4 ·

In every part of the country I found an acceptance of the fact that our government has broken down. It was rare, of course, that I heard any such direct expression upon the subject. Americans have a natural though generally unsuspected sentimental affection for their government: particularly for the Constitution (which virtually none of them have read) and for the charming romanticism of heroic fellows in powdered wigs writing it down. They like the theory immensely. But their attitude toward the practice is one of curiously bland amusement — an amusement that is born, I think, of despair. Any movement toward a downright change in the machinery would be howled down at once, I think. That is the paradox.

More than once, I drew a clipping from my pocket and handed it to men to read. It was a letter written by George Washington to John Jay in 1787, and it ran:

"Among men of reflection, few will be found, I believe, who are not beginning to think that our system is more perfect in theory than in practice; and that notwithstanding the boasted virtue of America it is more than

probable we shall exhibit the last melancholy proof, that mankind are not competent to their own government without the means of coercion in the sovereign."

Yes, they said, Washington was right.

"What should we do about it?" I asked.

"What can we do about it?" they answered. "Get a king?"

"We might work out a new system, a better one, and try again," I suggested.

But that was Bolshevism. They wanted nothing like that. The most certain influence in the world to prevent the terror of revolution in America is the Communism of Russia. Everybody knows a few vague facts about Russia. And they view any suggestion of change in our system as the first awful step toward the nationalization of women, the murder of all self-respecting burghers, and the looting of banks.

Many times, I heard men say, "We must have a leader. We can't get along much further without a leader."

Yet it seems so clearly apparent that we cannot have a leader, that we are committed irrevocably to the policy of drift. No single man could know enough about America to lead it: to lead the Georgia tenant farmers and the New York bankers, the naturalized Portuguese of New England and the Detroit machine workers, the Louisiana Cajuns and the Minnesota Danes. Even if such a genius among men would rise up, it seems unlikely that he could catch the ear of the multitude long enough to make them follow him. For we are bombarded every moment, through the press and the radio and the talking pictures, with the shouts of men who would be leaders. All day long, every day, the words pour into our ears. How could we distinguish the

genius and press toward him, even if he could be found and set to talking?

So it seems that we shall pursue our destiny haphazardly, taking what leadership the idle chance of elections might give us, always a little suspicious of it, drifting with the slowness of all vast bodies toward that ultimate excellence which we so vaguely cherish. Meantime, we are hardly a nation at all but a simple agglomeration of people. There is no coherence among the myriad individuals, the myriad ambitions. We cannot be a nation in the true sense because we have no national ideals, no national aims. On occasion we can work ourselves into a sweat over some pretty phrase, as when we labored to make the world safe for democracy. But those moods never hold. We really do not care, except in public, whether the world is safe for democracy or whether it is not, as long as our individual lives run smoothly in their narrow channels.

The ideals and the aims upon which our country was founded have disappeared. They no longer occupy our minds, privately or publicly. Freedom and equality, self-government and the pursuit of happiness survive only as phrases for Fourth of July orators. Nor have these worthy desires been replaced by other ideals, other aims. And the result is a subconscious demoralization which does not by any means spring wholly from the economic depression. The pain of such a national aimlessness is felt, unconsciously no doubt, by nearly every individual. It is one reason for our restlessness, our urgent desire for leadership, or for some not-too-painful catharsis that will cleanse us of our chaos and put purpose into our lives. It is one reason for our fierce expenditure of energy upon trivial concerns, for we are an active people, physically and mentally, and

even an altogether meaningless striving seems better to us than no striving at all. . . .

Yet, at the end, I think it is impossible to avoid a feeling of deep affection for this expansive land that we inhabit, a warm and perhaps sentimental devotion to its generosity, its kindness, its courage and its childlike simplicity. And so, ladies and gentlemen, I give you my country: America — a wilderness crying for a voice.

GEORGE ANNAND

DOMINION
of
CANADA
DULUTH
MINNEAPOLIS
Madison
MILWAUKEE
CHICAGO
DETROIT
CLEVELAND
Springfield
Indianapolis
CINCINNATI
KANSAS CITY
ST. LOUIS
LOUISVILLE
ATLANTA
New ORLEANS
Rochester
BUFFALO
PITTSBURGH
Baltimore
Washington
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